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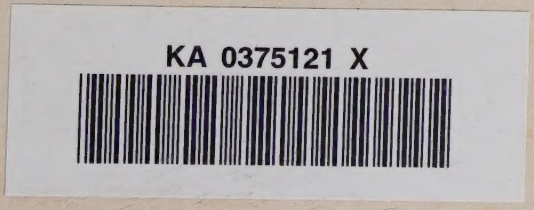

# STUDIES OF A BIOGRAPHER

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# STUDIES OF A BIOGRAPHER

*By* LESLIE STEPHEN

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LESLIE STEPHEN.

*September* 1902.

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# STUDIES OF A BIOGRAPHER

## THE BROWNING LETTERS

THE publication of the Browning correspondence naturally calls attention to a troublesome section in the code of literary morality: the section, that is, which deals with the claims of men of genius to posthumous privacy. The authorised version is often taken to be that we should refrain from making public anything which a man would have jealously guarded from publicity in his lifetime. It is easy to denounce the intrusion of the 'many-headed beast' and to speak as though death made no difference in the sanctity of the domestic sphere. Nobody would print his own love-letters while he is alive, and therefore nobody should print them when he has ceased to live. That inference would take us far, and, if it were admitted to be the law, would most certainly have awkward consequences. We may surely be allowed, without offence, to look even into some love-secrets of men and women who can no longer

be wounded by our (let us hope) respectful and sympathetic interest. If we did not know something, say, of old Johnson's love for his Tetty, we should be imperfectly aware of the sweetest element of his character; though we should have justified his roughest retort if we had asked impertinent questions in his lifetime. I confess, indeed, that I am rather suspicious of commonplace morality on such matters. It si easy and flattering to one's vanity to perch oneself upon a good round maxim which everybody will approve in theory, and which, as we are also quite aware, nobody will force us to apply in practice. However gravely we may speak, we shall read the next indiscreet revelation, and our enjoyment will only have the keener edge from our affectation of prudery. We can atone for our enjoyment of contraband goods by vigorously abusing the smuggler. And then the suspicion intrudes that in professing to pitch our standard so high, we are not really preaching sound morality. The danger strikes one especially in connection with Browning. One of his favourite themes is the conflict between the conventional code, which is perfectly plausible and perhaps correct in the average case, with the highest law which is recog-

nised by the superior nature. A priest ought not, as a rule, to help a married woman to run away from her husband; but the *Ring and the Book* gives the exceptional case in which, by breaking the rule, a man may show the truest nobility of character. And so, perhaps, it may be urged that, even assuming the advantages of reticence in general, there are cases in which it may cover a paltry regard for conventional propriety. When we have a man and a woman of genius, may it not be good for the world to know, even in the fullest detail, how they loved and revealed their love to each other, and how the love ennobled their lives and their work? The case, it might be added, is too rare to be drawn into a precedent. Nobody will learn much from the flirtations of the ordinary human being, or even of the second rank of ephemeral celebrities. But when we have to do with so unique a case—with a man of undisputed pre-eminence in his art and a woman worthy of him—must it not be good for us to watch every heart-beat, and follow the most minute developments of the great passion of their lives?

Have we not precedents which show that the system is inevitable, and, moreover, that it has led to some very desirable results? The best books

to read, as somebody has remarked upon such an occasion, are the books that ought never to have been written. In Shakespeare's time there was nobody to investigate the Ann Hathaway business, or to ask what was implied by the famous 'second-best bed.' If there had been, we might have been spared some of the wild hypotheses which fill the void of authentic history. The inquisitorial system began, I take it, in England in the days of Queen Anne. Curll, as Arbuthnot told Pope, added a new terror to death. That prototype of piratical booksellers procured and published some of Pope's early letters; and Pope found that the injury had its advantages. He managed to get more of his letters 'stolen' and published by prompting the theft himself; and, while he exhibited his modesty by protesting against the outrage, he had also the pleasure of knowing that 'the nation'—as Johnson puts it—'was filled with the praises of his candour, tenderness, and benevolence, the purity of his purposes, and the fidelity of his friendship.' That is a typical case: the morbidly sensitive poet, induced to connive at (or, in his case, to contrive) the violation of his rights to privacy, and driven to whole series of mean intrigues by the pleasure of

turning himself inside out for public inspection. Since his time we have had similar exhibitions on a larger scale. Rousseau said that he was making a new experiment, and one which would have no imitators, by exhibiting a man as he really was, and that man himself. The exhibition, it is generally agreed, was not altogether edifying; but it is also agreed that it was singularly fascinating. It was certainly a step beyond Pope. To call upon mankind to admire your virtues, and even to manufacture sham virtues for the purpose, is an intelligible aim, but it amounted to a discovery when your vices and your meannesses were employed for the same purpose. It is easy enough to preach upon the morality of the criminals; it would be proper to add in a pulpit that they were not promoting the welfare of their souls by such transactions. But, then, can we honestly say when we are out of the pulpit, that we wish that they had not done it? Pope's contrivances at least added to our literature one of the most interesting collections of correspondence in the language; a series of letters which puts us face to face with some of the most brilliant of our writers, and enables us to realise as nothing else can do the strength and the weakness, the shrewd-

ness and the hypocrisy, of the great lights of the time. Granting that Pope should not himself have published, and certainly that he should not have falsified, the documents, can we deny that they are documents of the highest interest? Would we have burnt them if the alternative had been possible? In speaking of Rousseau, the only danger is that of exaggerating the importance of his work. To suppress his writings would have been to suppress the fullest utterance of the contemporary spirit; and, whether that spirit was of heaven or hell, or a strange mixture of both, its revelation to itself and us was surely desirable. Rousseau's prophecy that he would have no followers in his enterprise has hardly been fulfilled, unless in the sense that no one has been quite so reckless in self-exposure. Byron is not the only person who has exhibited to Europe the 'pageant of a bleeding heart,' and it need not be argued that the practice is often injurious to the simplicity and dignity of the performer. Even so, the world may be, on the whole, the gainer. And, if we can get rid of the degrading part of the performance, the complicity of the man exposed in his own exposure, may we not have the benefit without paying such a price? It is a natural, and

surely an excusable, desire which prompts us to learn something more of the character of the great men who have stirred the thoughts and directed the passions of the race. A great writer, it is said, reveals the best part of himself in his works. But the longing for a more direct vision of the man behind the book, of the struggles by which he won his way to his successes, of the strength and the weaknesses by which he was helped and hindered, facilitates a clear appreciation of the works themselves. Even the greatest literary achievement becomes 'gilt o'er dusted,' and the best way of restoring is to watch in imagination the living hand which wrought it. Some appreciation of that truth must be allowed to the generations of Dryasdusts who have sought even from the driest receptacles—of which Carlyle complained so bitterly—to put together, if not a living figure, at least a framework to which we can adapt our more or less fanciful pictures. If the need is felt where the means of supply are so limited, can we blame the same sort of curiosity when it is applied to our near contemporaries? The interviewer, so his victims report, is apt to be a nuisance, impertinent and intrusive. But can we condemn him unreservedly? Is there not some-

thing legitimate in the demand? Suppose him to speak the truth, what harm can he be really doing? He ought not, it may be suggested, to reveal a great man's infirmities. What is it to us if Coleridge took opium? The drug had, no doubt, some share in producing *Kubla Khan*; but may we not enjoy the product without considering the physiological conditions which were implied? The answer is obvious. A man's infirmities are, after all, part of him; they cannot be put aside like his coat or his shoes; and very often they suggest the only excuse for his shortcomings. To compare the estimate of Coleridge's genius formed by his contemporaries with his actual output of work achieved, to judge of the influence which he exercised in philosophy by his fragmentary attempts at possible prolegomena to a system, is to set oneself an insoluble problem, unless we know the facts. He cannot be fairly judged until we know how his astonishing powers were hampered by a weakness which still left him both lovable and capable of stimulating other intellects. The life, no doubt, may be suppressed altogether; but to take only a bit of it, and such a bit as his friends might think edifying, is to turn the whole story into a hopeless conundrum. The

demand for such knowledge has been increased by modern scientific tendencies. The man of science is constantly demanding a closer and wider intimacy with facts. No fact can be so small or repulsive that it may not be of use in testing or suggesting theory. The historian follows suit. He finds that in the masses of records which were neglected by an earlier generation there are materials for reconstructing history at large. By elaborate researches into what passed for mere rubbish-heaps, he can discover facts essential to an intelligent appreciation of social and intellectual development. What was once the pursuit of eccentric antiquaries, animated by an unreasoning love of curiosities, becomes worthy of the keenest intellects searching for light in the dark foundations of things. A fact, simply as a fact, becomes sacred in the eyes of such inquirers. It may not be of interest in itself; but no one can tell what part it may not play incidentally in clearing up some general principle. Historians of literature catch the contagion, and employ themselves in worrying out minute dates and infinitesimal bibliographical facts with an industry which, let us hope, will have its reward. Certainly it is not for one who has had anything to do with biographical

inquiries to throw cold water upon such a spirit, or to deny that it helps an intelligent study of literature.

If so, why may we not apply the same method to contemporaries as soon as we can do so without hurting the feelings of survivors? Undoubtedly there are precautions to be observed. Froude's performance in regard to Carlyle has furnished a leading case. It is, however, necessary to remark the precise nature of the offence. Froude, as I am fully convinced, meant to do honour to his old prophet. He took himself to be following the principle which Boswell avowed when protests were made against his revelations of Johnson's foibles. His lion, he said, should not be made into a cat for anybody. He would not pare the lion's claws or lessen the ferocity of his growl. Froude thought that Carlyle deserved a portrait in the manner of Rembrandt, vivid and full of character, with due depth of shadow to throw out the intensity of the lights. The aim, I take it, was clearly right. That was precisely what a biographer ought to do. It is another question whether the means were justifiable. He is accused of using Carlyle's love-letters without due authority, and, moreover, of misreading them. But

suppose, for I am not arguing the question of Froude's morality, that he had given an accurate version of the facts? Had he told the story as it really happened, and that story one essentially honourable to both of the persons concerned, would he not have rendered us a service? Whether he was right in over-riding Carlyle's wishes is, of course, a question; but were the wishes themselves justifiable? Was it not a mistake to desire the suppression of the story when it could be told without hurting the feelings of the living? Feeling, as every one must, the indecency of giving publicity to such documents for a time, does there not come a day when the privilege of privacy should disappear? If such letters had been found throwing light upon Cromwell's youth, would not Carlyle have published them without hesitation? Sir William Temple's love-letters of that date were published a few years ago, and nobody, I fancy, complained of any violation of secrecy. At what point does the obligation cease? How are we to settle this point of casuistry? Shall we say that letters should be private for a generation or a century: or admit rather that, as soon as there is no living person to be affected, a full revelation is permissible and desirable?

In the case of the Browning letters there is happily no question of any breach of confidence. Browning left them with full permission to his son to do as he pleased with them. Whether the publication was judicious or otherwise, it was sufficiently authorised by the person most interested. In the letters themselves, there is an incidental discussion of a similar point. Miss Barrett had sent to Browning a letter in which Miss Martineau had described Wordsworth. Browning remarks in reference to the burning of some other correspondence that you may burn anybody's '*real* letters,' they 'move and live . . . in a self-imposed circle limiting the experience of two persons only.' And he proceeds to argue, with characteristic superabundance of metaphor, that the presence of a third person 'lets in a whole tract of country on the originally enclosed spot,' so that the 'whole significance is lost at once.' 'Clever writing,' on the other hand, such as Miss Martineau's, gives only such an impression as is intelligible to the world at large. An intimate dialogue, if I understand him, altogether loses its character when there is a listener; but Miss Martineau's descriptions give only the observations open to any indifferent bystander. Miss Barrett,

in replying, goes further. She values letters, she says, as the 'most vital part of biography.' She is astonished that any rational human being should 'put his foot on the traditions of his kind in this particular class.' We should lose, for example, such a delightful book as Voltaire's correspondence. She could enjoy 'book after book of such reading.' Were we to accept Miss Martineau's principle (apparently that such letters might be circulated in manuscript, but never printed) 'death would be deader henceforth.' We ought all to be ready 'to say that if the secrets of our daily lives and inner souls may instruct other sorrowing souls, let them be open to men hereafter as they are to God now. Dust to dust, and soul secrets to humanity.' And she proceeds to say that, though she shrinks 'from the idea of publicity on any terms,' and would destroy papers of 'her own, sacred to her for personal reasons,' she would not 'call this natural weakness a virtue,' or justify it as a general maxim for public acceptance. If 'soul secrets' belong to humanity, if we are all entitled to look into the most intimate experiences of all our predecessors, it appears that no line can be drawn. Anything and everything is public property; and, after our death, the world is to be allowed to listen to what-

ever we might have been required to say in the confessional. The natural shrinking is, if not a sin, a regrettable weakness. That, if granted, is a full justification by anticipation of the publicity bestowed upon these letters. If a woman, so exquisitely sensitive, condemns herself for shrinking from a revelation of her soul secrets, how is an outsider to say that she was wrong?

Yet, in spite of the authority, which no doubt justifies the son's action, and of the argument which I fully admit to have its force, I have some hesitation as to the conclusion. I felt unpleasantly like an unjustifiable eavesdropper while reading these letters, and I cannot at once admit that the feeling was simply erroneous, or due to the illusion that the writers of letters so full of life must still be living. Can I justify that instinctive repulsion, or justify it without falling into the mere commonplaces of respectable morality? In some respects there is obviously no room for complaint. There is no question of a revelation of anything painful to survivors or discreditable to the writers. The letters can only confirm whatever judgment we have already formed of the depth and tenderness of character of Browning and his wife. They are an ideal pair of lovers. The question comes up

several times in these volumes whether it be possible for poets to be good husbands and wives. Mrs. Browning's friends seem to have been inclined to drop little cynical maxims. They think marriage in general is a failure; that the more love there is at starting the less there will be afterwards; and that poets, in particular, are apt to make very bad husbands. A certain number of precedents might be produced in favour of the last doctrine; but these letters prove conclusively that if too often verified it is not necessarily true. Probably one's first reflection is that the love of poets is in substance remarkably like the love of other people; and that is only the other side of the obvious remark that even ordinary people are poets in so far as they are lovers. The difference is that we who are inarticulate owe to the poet the full expression of all that gives the truest happiness and beauty to our commonplace lives. Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are a concentrated utterance of what she says in prose in these letters; and the letters show how the poetic sentiment brightened every little prosaic detail in the brief drama of the courtship. The feeling on both sides is so pure and intense that every letter increases our affection for

the writers. And, in a sense, the sentiment is as true as it is strong and tender. I say 'in a sense,' for I certainly do not mean to affirm that the opinions expressed are to be taken as correct. Undoubtedly there are illusions—illusions, perhaps, as to each other's unique excellence and the intrinsic value of certain poems. But the illusions, whatever they may be, and one could not wish them to be less, do not distort the perception of the essential facts. In other cases, we are too often called upon to forgive grave errors, to drop, for the moment perhaps, one or two of the Ten Commandments, in sheer admiration of the strength of passion which has leapt very useful barriers. But here we are in the happy position of sympathising with a devotion which only strengthens the instinctive and instantaneous perception of what is right and becoming.

There seems at starting to be a little danger of the predominance of the author over the human being. There are certain references to 'art being a jealous God,' and demanding the whole man and woman, suggesting a possibility of a kind of cant which always becomes absurd as soon as its language is old-fashioned. The 'artist,' even in those days when we were all (as our posterity tells

us) so stupid, liked to live in a little esoteric world and celebrate his mysteries with due solemnity, to look out with contempt upon the average Philistine (though the phrase was not yet popularised), and receive the homage of appreciative Americans and the mild lady-authors who still thought literary ambition a rather audacious breach of the proprieties. There is mention in one place of an English nobleman who ventured to study art at Rome in a blouse and a 'flapped hat.' We, the devotees of art, are to see how superior he was to his fellows who were playing at the feudal baron on their estates, or perhaps even superintending a dog-fight in St. Giles'. There is 'something fascinating,' says Miss Barrett, in that 'Bohemian way of living,' and we are invited to wish well to this gallant defiance of British prejudice. There can be no doubt that painting is a more creditable occupation than dog-fighting, though it seems a little unfair to suggest such an unpleasant amusement as the typical alternative. Still, a man may attend a studio in a blouse without being a superior being, and I somehow feel as if that little literary and artistic world of 1845 had standards of excellence before which I cannot bow the knee unreservedly. Perhaps it is partly

because the secondary luminaries on this stage, Miss Mitford and Mrs. Jameson, and (Orion) Horne and Mr. Kenyon—though they had great merits—are already fading into comparative oblivion, and it requires an effort to allow for the effect of perspective. But it is a charm of these letters that this element of the situation affects only the earlier letters. Browning and Miss Barrett began by mutual appreciation as authors, and, of course, have to start upon the common platform of literary communication. A little literary talk about Æschylus and the relations of northern and Italian poets, and the past and intended works of the correspondents is, of course, inevitable, and certainly not uninteresting. But Browning very soon discovers the unsatisfactory nature of mere literary work, and explains his view by one of his characteristic parallel cases out of *Vivian Grey*. A gentleman in that novel is about to interrupt the development of the story by reading some 'brief remarks upon the characteristics of the Mœso-Gothic literature.' The author, however, upon consideration, judiciously omits the remarks, as you find upon turning the page. You will ask, says Browning, what this 'parallel case' means; and Miss Barrett admits

that he does talk 'a little like a sphinx.' Browning proceeds to 'explain' in his next. The explanation immediately lands him in a 'slough of similes,' out of which he has to struggle, 'never mind with what dislocation of ankles.' He only escapes to fall into other similes and illustrations of his meanings, and ends by expressing his hope that he has 'cleared up all the difficulty' and put things quite straight. Undoubtedly he had, to Miss Barrett's apprehension, though I confess that my own intellect remains a little befogged.

The general upshot, however, is sufficiently clear. Browning, one fancies, takes refuge in his parallel cases—his favourite device in poetical arguments—because he is still a little embarrassed in writing to a lady whom he had not yet seen. But he wishes to get out of the region of small talk, even in the exalted form of literary criticism, and to speak to her of more vitally interesting matters. And before long we find both of them anxious to repudiate the literary sentiment as anything but the mere vehicle for the purely personal passion. Browning protests that his admiration of Miss Barrett as an author is entirely different from his love of herself. He held his peace about her poetry till he had a sense of 'purely personal

obligation,' and, if she were never to write another line, or speak another 'intelligible word,' he would love her not less but more. His 'whole life is wound up and down and over her.' And she, though she loves his poetry, agrees that it is not 'the flower of his nature.' That flower is something nameless and mystical. She used to fancy that she could see him in his poems; but then 'broken sights and forms look strange and unlike' when she 'stands by the complete idea.' She only wishes that he would reveal his personality more clearly by uttering himself directly without the dramatic apparatus which is apt to puzzle the less intelligent readers. And here one must apologise for quoting scraps of sentences which seem to lose their force and grace when detached from the context. Browning to the end has the odd tendency to put things in a quaint and tortuous fashion, which is represented by the 'put-case' of his later poems. But no love-letters since the days of Heloisa could be more glowing with a devotion which one can only regard with reverence. Both of them have, of course, a pretext for exerting their ingenuity in that old problem which is tiresome in ethical philosophers, but infinitely delightful between a pair of lovers. Is not

'altruism' a refined self-love? If I am so devoted to some one else that his happiness becomes my happiness, am I not really selfish even when I am sacrificing myself to him? That suggests an infinite variety of tender caressing 'quibbles.' In loving him, as Miss Barrett protests, she never thought of being happy through him; his good was all her idea of good. That is unmistakably true, but then it is equally obvious that his own happiness necessarily implies her happiness, and her logic—if logic were really concerned—would be a little difficult to untwist. Or, again, there is, as Browning observes, a contest of generosity. Each wishes to be grateful for the other's kindnesses; but then, from the other's point of view, the kindness is so obviously a matter of course that gratitude is a solecism. You, says each, are my ideal of perfection, and to have an ideal of perfection implies power of appreciating real excellence. Titania could not love Bottom in her sober senses, and the lover must admit, even by worshipping her, that he is considerably superior to Bottom. Browning, in fact, sums up the dilemma in one of his later letters by roundly declaring that 'there is no love but from beneath, far beneath—that is the law of its nature.' But then, as he entirely believes in

her love for him, the remark would naturally be made by the proverbial Senior Wrangler that each of two objects cannot be lower than the other. Miss Barrett, in fact, takes the only possible solution when she declares that love should have no reason or be its own reason. The motive, she reports herself to have said, should be in the feeling itself, and not in the object of it; and the affection which could throw itself out 'on an idiot with a goitre would be more admirable than Abelard's!' Some awkward deductions might follow from that principle too, but we can, as enlightened lookers-on, supply some very obvious reasons, not being bound to take either side in the play of ostensible argument, which is, in fact, merely one way of expressing entire mutual devotion and what Browning once calls agreement to the point of 'tremblingly exquisite exactness.'

It would appear that on the whole, though Browning never admits it, Miss Barrett succeeds best in getting into the attitude of a worshipper. The situation naturally implies it. Brought up, as she says, in a kind of conventual seclusion, looking at the world mainly through books, and with her sensibilities stimulated by her invalid life, she was even abnormally feminine, and it is easy

to understand why, as she often says, his love for her appeared to her as a 'miracle,' a sure support coming beyond all reasonable expectation, and lifting her into life and happiness. From the very first her instinct tells her to put absolute trust in Browning's honour and generosity. That the instinct was entirely justified by the facts does not prove that it was infallible. It would be easy to speculate upon the results which might have followed, had Browning shared the weaknesses of some great poets—Coleridge or Shelley, for example; whether she might not have become the heroine of a tragedy, had she trusted to a man, selfish or simply weak, or valuing her enthusiasm only so far as it was a pleasant offering of incense upon the altar of his genius. That Miss Barrett was not incapable of illusions seems to be clear from her view of that wonderful person, her father. No one, as she assures Browning, had a heart 'loyaller, and purer, and more compelling to gratitude and reverence, than his,' *as she sees it.* The proof is remarkable. The brother whom she especially loved had been staying with her at Torquay by her especial request, and in spite of the father's disapproval. While they were there, the brother took a boat and was accidentally

drowned, and the father was so 'generous and forbearing' as never once to tell her that it was her fault. That must have been a tempting remark to bestow upon a heart-broken daughter; and would no doubt have been a relief to his feelings. Meanwhile he has the trifling weakness of holding that he rules by divine right; and is entitled to suppress as altogether disgusting and anomalous monstrosities any love affairs of his children. If the daughters confess to such criminal proceedings, he makes scenes which send one of them into hysterics and another into a dead faint. He would rather see Elizabeth dead at his feet, she admits, than consent to her acceptance of Browning. Since the days of Clarissa Harlowe there never was such a preposterous family despot. Miss Barrett, however, believes sincerely, and expects her lover to believe, both that the old gentleman is *not* stone, and that he is immovable *as* a stone. He has, as she most undeniably puts it, a 'very peculiar nature,' of which Browning, one suspects, would have been able to make a very effective dramatic sketch. He resolves, however, that he will always see these things with her eyes, and will never say anything to give her pain. He has, indeed, to say, though

with characteristically tortuous phrases, that the tyranny is intolerable, and that she is not to sacrifice herself to the tyrant. As she was happily clear upon that point, he is able to maintain a reticence which is not less honourable than his utterance. I fancy that, in the one or two passages in the letters in which something like a controversy arises, Browning is really giving vent to an accumulated desire for plain-speaking, which he would have liked to discharge upon the head of Mr. Barrett. He defends duelling and capital punishment with a vigour that gives her some pain, and causes her to drop the subject; and he insists upon the objections to her paying ransom to the dog-stealers who had appropriated her favourite Flush. There is just a momentary glimpse of the shrewd man of the world opposing amiable sentimentalism. The topics were harmless, as the practical danger of Browning fighting a duel was of the minutest, and as he made sure that the dog-stealers had got their money before he entered his protest. If Mr. Barrett's behaviour had been discussable with the same frankness, Browning would have relieved his feelings at the cost of inflicting real suffering upon his beloved. He shows, however, perfect self-restraint in that

matter, and throughout maintains the most unimpeachable attitude. He had the reward which he deserved; and one of the great charms in the letters is the gradual brightening of Miss Barrett's life—the wakening to real, vivid happiness of the poor, broken, tremulous invalid who is revealed in the opening passages. A little sign of excessive sensibility remains in her superfluous apologies for apparently 'light words'; for phrases in which she has permitted herself to speak as though it were conceivable that he might some day see through some of his illusions about her, or that he might doubt her readiness to agree to all his plans; phrases in which a duller insight than Browning's might read clearly enough only an appeal for delightful utterances of absolute confidence. It is 'wonderful to me,' so she sums up the situation, 'to look back on my life and my old philosophy of life, made of the necessities of sorrow and the resolution to attain to something better than a perpetual moaning and complaint—to that state of neutralised emotion to which I did attain—that serenity which meant the failure of hope! Can I look back to such things and not thank you next to God? For you, having the power to stoop and having the will, is it not

worthy of thanks? So I thank you and love you, and shall always, however it may be hereafter.' Browning could, no doubt, believe with equal sincerity that his cause for gratitude was not less; and one may say that even he could not speak too strongly—or strongly enough—of the blessing which had come to him. Yet, to the outsider, the 'miraculous' nature of the reward is more palpable in her case. The prison doors were thrown open for her beyond reasonable expectation; whereas he, as we must admit, had, in any case, a noble though not so beautiful a career open to him independently.

I have not attempted to do more than recall what must be obvious to all readers of the letters. I only wish to explain the feeling which, as I know, is shared by more competent readers than I can profess to be. They too have had their scruples vanquished by the remarkable revelation of beautiful character. The sense that so intimate a set of letters should not be laid bare to the public has been gradually overcome by the perception of their singular charm. And, in fact, one conclusion seems to be undeniable. Mr. Browning tells us in his preface that he had either to destroy these letters or to permit their publication. It

does not appear to be self-evident that no third course was open ; but if we take that for granted, his decision was unimpeachable. Undoubtedly it would have been a wrong to the memory of his parents, had the letters been suppressed. We should have lost a story which is in some ways more charming and impressive than any of his poetry. People who met Browning occasionally accepted the commonplace doctrine that the poet and the man may be wholly different persons. Browning, that is, could talk like a brilliant man of the world, and the commonplace person could infer that he did not possess the feelings which he did not care to exhibit at a dinner-party.[1] It was not difficult to discover that such a remark showed the superficiality of the observer, not the absence of the underlying qualities. These letters, at any rate, demonstrate to the dullest that the intensity of passion which makes the poet was equally present in the man. It is worth our while to have

[1] Perhaps I may be permitted to give a small reminiscence. I happened to meet Browning at a moment of great interest to me. I knew little of him then, and had rather taken him at the valuation indicated above. He spoke a few words, showing such tenderness, insight, and sympathy, that I have never forgotten his kindness ; and from that time knew him for what he was. I cannot say more ; but I say so much by way of expressing my gratitude.

such a demonstration to recognise the depth and purity of the sources from which genuine poetry springs, even at the price of some shock to our sense of decorum. The only question is, whether the same result might not have been achieved with a less sweeping revelation. I will not venture to express any distinct opinion, because I do not quite see the force of Mr. Browning's dilemma; but I will suggest a consideration or two which seem to me to be relevant.

The world at large, as Miss Barrett says, has a right to the 'soul secrets' of eminent people. Is that true? In a sense, one may fully accept the doctrine. It is well to know the truth about the men and women who have left us intellectual legacies; it is well, even if the truth be not, as in this case it certainly is, altogether gratifying. Every such life has what we call its 'lesson,' and one not the less instructive if the career implies some of the worst human qualities. Pope could lie enormously, and Burns could be decidedly coarse, and Byron was not a pattern of domestic excellence. I should wish the essence of the character to be revealed to me in every case; and should be profoundly interested by the truth, though I might not extract a definite moral or learn what is called a lesson.

But, I think, there is a certain confusion between the demand for truth which is perfectly justified, and the demand for all the knowledge which has any bearing whatever upon the history of the person concerned. There are, after all, a great many facts of which one may as well be ignorant. They are irrelevant, and nobody would be the worse if they went into the waste-paper basket. It does not follow that because I want fact not fiction I therefore want all the facts, big and small; the poet's washing-bills, as well as his early drafts of great works. There are purposes, indeed, for which it is necessary to preserve everything that can be known. The scientific habit of mind demands, as I have said, the preservation of things in general, because some day anything may have its uses; the lawyer may feel bound to investigate every conceivable tittle of evidence, however minute the chance of its having any relevance; a biographer may be bound to act upon this principle in his investigations, and to follow out the ramifications of his hero's career as though he were engaged in the presumptuous attempt to find out everything about the Dreyfus case. But then he need not present the whole mass to the world. That might be desirable if the 'soul

secrets' corresponded to the discovery of a scientific formula in psychology, if it were a question of finding new laws of human nature comparable to laws of chemistry or electricity. But such secrets are altogether beyond our powers. We do not study the lives of great men as scientific psychologists, but in order to have a vivid presentation of some interesting type of character. That may be stimulating, elevating, or saddening; but it is a question of art, not of science; of giving the concentrated personal essence of the mind, not of keeping up the greatest possible mass of details. So far from giving all details, no detail should be admitted which does not more or less directly contribute to heighten the effect of a lifelike portraiture. The antiquary's delight in gathering together all possible scraps and fragments is no doubt pardonable, and a harmless recreation in its way, though when I see the method applied to contemporaries, I am tempted to think that it implies less genuine admiration than a desire to prove that the admiration is genuine. The lover cherishes every scrap that reminds him of his mistress, and you therefore try to convince yourself that you are a lover by gathering scraps, though perhaps really caring for

nothing else. There comes to be competition among the idolaters who collect relics of a great man, which proves the spread, not of a real appreciation, but of the knowledge that appreciation is the correct thing. A poet, I fancy, has often most worthy adherents when the adherents are few, and the spread of his fame implies the growth of sham sentiments.

The bad results of this more or less factitious enthusiasm are too familiar to be insisted upon. Everybody agrees that the interviewer, contemporary or posthumous, is capable of becoming an intolerable nuisance, and is a specific for the encouragement of morbid tendencies in poets. Literature is, in all cases, a demoralising occupation, though some people can resist its evil influences. It is demoralising because success implies publicity. A poet has to turn himself inside out by the very conditions of his art, and suffers from the incessant stimulants applied to his self-consciousness. The temptation is inevitable, and is, of course, the stronger and the more corrupting as the right to satisfy a vulgar curiosity is more generally admitted. Formerly, if a man wanted to talk about himself, he wrote an autobiography to be published post-

humously, and there was therefore some safeguard, in so far as he was not to be directly conscious of the effect produced. Now, the autobiography is being superseded by the 'reminiscences,' in which every one is invited to explain what a genial and charming creature he is; how thoroughly he appreciates his contemporaries, and how superior he is to any desire for popular praise. If reminiscing is not a name for hypocritical attitudinising, it shows, as I am glad to believe, what charming and excellent people many of our contemporaries still are, in spite of all the corrupting influences to which they are exposed.

The difficulty about the Browning letters is, I think, this: whether, in spite of their own undeniable merits, they will not set a precedent eminently likely to be abused. They may be justified as exceptional. The case is one of those in which the total result is so impressive and edifying that the ordinary rule may be disregarded. Unfortunately, when a precedent is set, there is no way of limiting the application to be made of it. Everybody is apt to be exceptional in his own eyes and in the eyes of his nearest relatives; and one fears that the habit of turning out the most private receptacles will be encouraged without reason by

the success of this particular performance. I am, I must frankly confess, not equal to solving this point of casuistry. Like other such problems, it cannot be solved by any distinct rule ; and all that one can do is to recognise the possibility of some bad consequences and reserve a right to condemn the next follower. There is, indeed, one other question. Admitting fully that the story ought to be told, that we had a right to be aware of this ennobling element in the lives of two such persons, was it really necessary that the whole correspondence should be published or the whole destroyed? I cannot help fancying that some one might have been found—though, no doubt, the task would have required very exceptional tact and insight—who could have given the truth without publishing the correspondence in mass. Undoubtedly it would have been necessary to use the words of the writers and to publish some of the letters completely. But the sense of impropriety which besets one every now and then in reading—that uncomfortable suspicion that one is, after all, an eavesdropper—is purely due to the following all the little ins and outs through so long a correspondence, and the feeling that one is looking over the shoulders of the writers at a moment when they

would certainly have shown the door to an intruder. I fancy that by confining the revelation to what was strictly necessary to reveal the essence of the situation, and by so showing a scrupulous regard for the consideration which makes for reticence, the book might have been equally and even more impressive, and the danger of setting a precedent diminished. But I do not know the facts well enough to be enabled to do more than throw out a suggestion, which, like most suggestions, is too late to be of any use.

# JOHN DONNE[1]

THERE is something curiously and yet intermittently fascinating about Donne. His fame has been fitful. After the obscuration of the eighteenth century Coleridge and Lamb felt a charm which has been potent with some later critics. Browning was drawn to him by a congenial subtlety of intellect, and Lowell, an equally ardent lover of all that is quaint and witty, read and annotated him carefully. But his poetry seems to be for the select few. Not one of his lyrics appears in *The Golden Treasury*, whether because Palgrave disliked a style which is the antithesis of Tennyson's, or because he thought it unfit for the ordinary reader. To read Donne's verses is, indeed, for most people, to crack very hard nuts on a doubtful chance of finding a sweet kernel.

[1] Mr. Beeching contributed an article upon Walton's life of Donne to the *Cornhill Magazine* for February 1900. He pointed out some blunders in this article as it appeared in the *National Review*. I have endeavoured to correct the errors indicated, and have altered a passage or two in which I seem to have said something which I did not mean.

Mr. Gosse, in the *Life* which has just appeared, professes his belief that Donne contains the quintessence of poetry; but even Dr. Jessopp—an enthusiastic admirer of the prose—honestly confesses that the poems are not to his taste. I may, therefore, take courage to confess that I too find them rather indigestible. They contain, I do not doubt, the true inspiration; but I rarely get to the end, even of the shortest, without being repelled by some strange discord in form or in substance which sets my teeth on edge. 'Donne is full,' says Lowell, 'of salient verses that would take the rudest March winds of criticism with their beauty, of thoughts that first tease us like charades, and then delight us with the felicity of their solution.' I fully accept Donne's poetical merits upon the authority of men blessed with a greater poetical sensibility than I can claim, and perhaps less out of harmony with his whole spirit. A charm, however, which one only recognises when it has been pointed out to one, is a charm of which one had better not speak. I will only say, in fact, that I am attracted as much as repelled. The man himself excites my curiosity. What was the character and the mind that could utter itself in so unique a fashion? Nothing less

could have been required than extraordinary talents at the service of a most peculiar idiosyncrasy, and exposed to some trying combination of circumstance. For explanation one has hitherto been referred to the admirable Izaak Walton. His life of Donne is said to be the masterpiece of English biography. Critic after critic labours to show a genial appreciation of that performance. If, indeed, the book is to be read as we read *The Vicar of Wakefield*—as a prose idyl—a charming narrative in which we have as little to do with the reality of Donne as with the reality of Dr. Primrose, I can only subscribe to the judgment of my betters. But there are two objections to the life if taken as a record of facts. The first is that the framework of fact is of the flimsiest; and the second that the portraiture has a palpably 'subjective' element. Hagiography in general is more attractive than trustworthy. As we read, we imagine Walton gazing reverently from his seat at the dean in the pulpit, dazzled by a vast learning and a majestic flow of elaborate rhetoric, which seemed to his worthy but unlearned disciple to come as from 'an angel in the clouds,'[1] and

[1] The phrase, as Mr. Beeching points out, comes from one of Donne's own poems ('To Mr. Tilman after he had taken orders'),

offering a posthumous homage as sincere and touching as that which no doubt engaged the condescending kindness of the great man in life. The book illustrates the most attractive aspect of the Anglicanism of those days. It recalls *John Inglesant* and the holy Mr. Ferrar of Little Gidding. But the real Donne—the strange complex human being, with his weaknesses, his passions, his remorse, his strange twists of thought and character—has disappeared, and just enough is revealed to make us ask for more. Our petition has been heard. For fifty years Dr. Jessopp has been collecting materials. He has made them over to Mr. Gosse, who cordially acknowledges the generosity of his ally. Mr. Gosse, already an independent inquirer and an accomplished historian of literature, has given us all that can now be discoverable. There are still gaps—gaps which suggest regrets that we cannot cross-examine Donne himself, and doubts whether, if we could, he would be a satisfactory witness. Mr. Gosse modestly avows that, to some extent, Donne 'eludes' him. The last secret of that singular

where it is said of preachers that they do 'as angels out of clouds, from pulpits speak.' It surely implies that Donne was a very good representative of the angels.

character remains impenetrable or to be guessed from imperfect glimpses. If Mr. Gosse hesitates after so much study and such familiarity with details, it is not for one who depends chiefly upon Mr. Gosse himself to speak with confidence. Biography, alas! even the biography of intimate friends involves, as soon as one tries to penetrate the inner life, a great deal of guesswork. Donne, with his strange facility for seeing things in unexpected lights, was so ingenious in discovering reasons that he probably misunderstood his own motives. How are we, judging from fragmentary records and ambiguous utterances and rose-coloured sophistications, at a distance of some three centuries, to speak with any confidence?

Without over-confidence, however, one may point out some elements of this curious psychological problem. From the outset events conspired to make life one long problem in casuistry for Donne himself. He was involved in the great religious struggles of the day, and his sympathies were curiously distracted. He came of the staunchest Catholic breed; no family, he said himself, had supplied more sufferers in the cause. An ancestress was sister of Sir Thomas More; other relations had risen under Mary and been exiled

under Elizabeth; his mother, who survived him, was a strong Catholic to the last; her two brothers were both Jesuits, and in Donne's childhood one of them was in an English gaol and unexpectedly fortunate in just avoiding the gallows to which his fellow-prisoners were sent. Donne, a singularly precocious child, might have been expected to catch the contagion of religious zeal. No one, we should say, had a mind or imagination more accessible to the manifold fascinations of the Catholic system. It would have been in the natural course of things had he been sent to Douay, become a seminary priest, and either attained eminence as a casuist or died as a martyr at Tyburn. He had, however, been entered at Oxford at the early age of eleven. He could thus avoid the oath of allegiance, imposed only at the age of sixteen, and his mother apparently assumed that supplies of knowledge could be inserted at any age. Donne, therefore, was brought up to be a rigid Catholic, and yet encouraged to mix with a Protestant world and attempt a secular career. His father had left him sufficient means, and at nineteen he was reading law at Lincoln's Inn. Before long his Catholicism was certainly fading; but how and why is not to be easily decided. How did

he come to snap the chain which bound him so closely to a family of zealots? Was it simple indifference to religion in general? or sacrifice of conscience to worldly interests? or a genuine process of intellectual change? Donne's answer is simple. It was the force of reason. He set to work, he says, to 'survey and digest' the whole body of controversy. He specially studied and elaborately annotated the great Catholic champion, Bellarmine, and 'about his twentieth year' came to be, if not a decided Protestant, yet far less than a decided Papist. This investigation, meanwhile, was but part of a wide range of study. He was 'diverted from legal studies' by the 'worst voluptuousness, which is an hydroptic immoderate desire of human learning and languages.' Undoubtedly, Donne 'sucked at the flagon' with 'a sacred thirst,' and honestly sought for escape from an awkward position by launching upon the boundless ocean of controversy. It is the natural impression of a youthful enthusiast in learning—especially the learning of that day—that a decision can be reached by worrying through endless disputations. The process is more likely to land a man in scepticism or rapid oscillation between different creeds than in any definite creed; and,

in fact, Donne seems to have been left in a rather neutral position. He 'betrothed himself,' says Walton rather vaguely, 'to no religion that might give him any other denomination than Christian.' Donne himself asserts the slowness of his decision as a proof of his honesty. It would, that is, have been clearly to his interest to be converted at once. But it was also clearly to his interest to be converted as soon as he could. The desire to investigate implies some doubt; and what, we should like to know, raised the doubt in a man so steeped in the purest Catholic tradition? He was, somehow, induced to test the strength of the intellectual fetters, which were obstacles to every ambition, but how far or with what intensity various motives—intellectual curiosity or the promptings of interest—operated is one of the insoluble questions.

This wide reading did not wholly absorb him. The eager student, while imbibing masses of law, divinity, and 'human learning' in general, was also, it appears, seeing life after the fashion of the young men in the later days of Elizabeth. He left his books, divines, philosophers, and chroniclers, as he tells us, to keep company 'with fighting and untrussed gallants.' The strange adventurers of the day, disbanded soldiers, and shifty hangers-on

of the nobility, broke in upon his seclusion, and added the book of life to his studies. He saw the plays and masques of the great time; he joined —if a solitary indication may be trusted—the wit-combats at the Mermaid; and he certainly became a friend of Ben Jonson. It is plain, too, that he laid up causes for future remorse. The 'satires,' 'elegies,' and many early poems are left to indicate his state of mind; but the indication itself requires an interpreter. The 'satires' represent one natural outcome of the time. By a not unnatural coincidence three or four contemporaries, especially Joseph Hall — whose career was closely parallel to Donne's—and the dramatist Marston, were independently writing similar satires. Brilliant young men, at once scornful of the world and yet proud of a premature interest in its ways, were inevitably satirists. Their position was analogous to that of the young Edinburgh Reviewers, showing their superiority by contempt for the world around. The precedent of the Roman satirists, who had not as yet been imitated, occurred to them all as a happy thought to determine the best form of utterance. They all, moreover, made the blunder of assuming that satire must be rough and uncouth and obscure.

A satirist must be a thorough cynic, a snarling foul-mouthed Diogenes, carrying his lantern into the slums and using coarse and indecent language to describe ugly sights. They had not made the simple discovery that the better our manners the more easily we can rub in a good caustic phrase. The movement was therefore a failure; but, meanwhile, Donne's attitude is no doubt significant both of his own character and of the time. Mr. Gosse insists upon the contrast between his poetry and the exquisite 'rose-coloured Elizabethan idealism.' Donne represents a change of sentiment in the rising generation symptomatic of the domestic discords which were to supersede the patriotic enthusiasm of the Armada period. It may perhaps be doubtful whether Mr. Gosse does not attribute to Donne too much of deliberate and conscious literary revolt. Donne was not, like Wordsworth, the deliberate prophet of a literary 'reaction.' But no doubt he was sitting in the seat of the scornful, and despised what we now take to be the glories of the age. The friendship with Jonson, who represented learning, and a critical superiority to people who had 'small Latin and less Greek,' is significant. Donne was the thoroughly trained scholar and gentleman, who

belonged therefore to the aristocracy of the literary world, and looked down upon the rabble of unlearned scribblers and playwrights with hands subdued to what they worked in.

Donne's poems, however, raise a far more interesting personal problem. Some of them show, to put it gently, a remarkable frankness. It is altogether surprising that he thought of printing, if not publishing, them at a period when he was aspiring to preferment in the Church. Certainly, as Mr. Gosse points out, they were calculated to make Archbishop Abbot's hair stand on end, and would be only too much to the taste of the courtiers of James I. It is strange, though characteristic, that Donne, even in his saintly days, could not find it in his heart to destroy, though he could not make up his mind to publish. The question arises, how far they represent genuine autobiography? Mr. Gosse holds that they tell a true story of an intrigue with a married woman, which, after a year, ended with a bitter quarrel and curses upon the now hated mistress. If Donne were as generally interesting as Shakespeare, his poems might be interpreted as variously as Shakespeare's sonnets. But I cannot think that the foundation of fact, if any existed, is really ascertainable. One remark

must be made. The frank disregard of decency is but too intelligible. What is strange is Donne's insistence upon the ugly and repulsive collateral consequences. The lady's husband had to be injured, and the objections of her father and mother to the suspected intimacy were inevitable. Donne's passion might blind him to their wrongs; but to insist upon that aspect of the question triumphantly and emphasise disgusting details is, to speak mildly, not pretty. If the poems were to be taken in their 'first intention' as deliberate utterances of his sentiments, we should have to call him not simply immoral, but unequivocally brutal. To me it seems that we merely have an illustration of a morbid tendency, not peculiar to Donne. In one of the 'elegies' Donne gives a description of another woman, only exceeded in offensiveness by some of Swift's worst performances. Swift's friends tell us that he was personally cleanly, even to scrupulosity, and that he contemplated filthy images because they had a perverse fascination for him. He was a self-torturer by nature, and dwelt upon disgusting things precisely because they disgusted him. Donne, I fancy, had in this respect a real affinity to the later dean. Carried away by his passions, he does not blind himself to the

brutality involved, but rather emphasises and insists upon it. For the moment his audacity in facing and minutely analysing consequences gives zest to his love or is a proof of the strength of passion which makes even this ingredient tolerable. But, when the passion declines, the feeling will turn into remorse, and perhaps is already, though half-consciously, remorse in disguise.

The interpretation may seem over subtle, but subtlety was the essence of Donne's nature. Both the student and the wild gallant appear in the poems of this date, and they are strangely combined in the qualities which led Johnson to describe Donne and his followers as the 'metaphysical' school. Literary critics have dwelt sufficiently upon the far-fetched conceits which gained currency at the same time in other countries. They are, it would seem, the natural utterances of the schoolman coming to court. Donne was all this time plunged in his omnivorous studies of divinity and philosophy. The philosophy in which he had been initiated at the Universities meant, of course, the still dominant scholastic philosophy. To reason was to 'syllogise'; to suppose that all truth was attainable by constructing vast piles of syllogism, defining, distinguishing,

spinning whole webs of argumentation, and becoming an accomplished master of the art of logical fencing. Donne had studied the application of the art to casuistry; had a special familiarity with the Spanish Jesuits of his time; and was steeped in whole masses of scholastic controversy. The training was calculated to produce abnormal skill in dialectics; to sharpen the purely logical perceptions, but also to encourage mere quibbling and ingenious evasions for real solutions of difficulties. Now, the sophistries and tricks of intellectual wrestling correspond exactly to the conceits of the 'metaphysical poets.' A commentator upon Donne's poems would have occasionally to illustrate his author from the schoolmen. Other poets, for example, have compared young women to angels; but to Donne, thoroughly acquainted with the natural history of angels, the comparison suggests new and strange points of resemblance. The schoolmen had taught him by syllogism that angels make temporary bodies out of air; and Donne makes poetical capital of this in the lyric called 'Air and Angels.' So his 'obsequies' to Lord Harrington raise the old problem whether angels in moving from one place to another pass through all the intermediate spaces. In the

'Hymn to the Saints and to Marquis Hamilton' he turns to account the scholastic doctrine that every angel is itself a 'separate species.' He several times expounds in verse the theory of three souls: vegetative, sensitive, and rational; and he knows at what precise moment the soul takes in 'the poisonous tincture of original sin.' Fuller information upon all these 'tickle points of niceness' may be found in the *Summa* of Aquinas, where they are carefully argued out. What strike us as unaccountable conceits are simply applications of the current philosophy. His mind is obviously full of such delicate inquiries, and he applies the same method to other topics. A characteristic poem is 'The Will.' He supposes himself to be dying, and bequeaths his moral and intellectual possessions. Then he works out a problem. A gift has not the proper virtue when the receiver is not benefited either (1) because he has a superfluity of the thing, or (2) because he does not know the use of it, or (3) because it is unpleasant to him, or (4) because it is really his own already, or (5) because accidents make it useless. His mistress has exemplified all these cases in her reception of him, and he concludes logically that he will die intestate. This

ingenious scheme might be stated as a theory of the ethics of giving—When is a present not a present? With Donne it becomes rhymed casuistry, or a brilliant little poem in six stanzas. Mr. Gosse quotes it as illustrating the phase in which his passion is turning to bitterness. Mr. Gosse may be justified; but it is the more characteristic that an outburst of passionate bitterness should be thus crammed into a close logical framework, which must, one supposes, have taken as much hard thinking as strong feeling. It is, in fact, this odd combination of syllogism and sentiment which gives one peculiar flavour to Donne's poetry, and makes him, as Coleridge put it, 'wreathe iron pokers into true-love knots.' Sometimes he seems to be merely a schoolman trying in spite of nature to be a poet; and at times reveals himself as a genuine poet, cramped and distorted by the training of the schools.

Donne, we are told, became a learned lawyer; but his mind, it is clear, could not be concentrated upon law-books. It was too discursive to confine itself within the limits of Coke. He might have become a divine: but his life hitherto had not been exactly clerical; his religious opinions were vague; and to take orders would have been to

shock his relations by an unqualified breach with their Church. For one career, however, he might seem to be admirably qualified. Where in our time a youth enters a public office, a youth of those days entered the 'family' of a great man. The relation was personal as much as official. At the age of twenty-four Donne, who had already accompanied Essex to Cadiz and on the Islands voyage, became secretary to the Lord Keeper Egerton. He must have felt himself to be well on the way to fortune. Learned and acute enough to be eminently useful to his patron, man of the world enough to be socially acceptable, and possessed of a special charm of manner and power of subtle flattery which specially recommended him to all the great ladies of the circle, the young secretary obviously had his foot on the ladder. And then comes the famous catastrophe which determined his future. 'His marriage,' says the worthy Walton, 'was the remarkable error of his life.' In spite of his ability in maintaining paradoxes, he was 'very far from justifying it,' and, indeed, 'would occasionally condemn himself for it.' The phrase, no doubt, refers to the clandestine proceedings which he had to employ; but one could have wished that he had used his skill

in casuistry to justify the means necessary for so good an end. To us who are at a different point of view, it is the one passage in Donne's life which gives us an unequivocal reason for loving him. Whatever his early faults, he was capable of a devoted and enduring passion. He probably did not foresee the consequences of his rashness, when he made his clandestine match with the girl of sixteen, who lived in his patron's house, and was the daughter of the rich Sir George More. He was prepared for some difficulty, and makes a quaint excuse for his folly. To have acted openly, he tells his indignant and involuntary father-in-law, 'would have been to impossibilitate the whole matter.' The remark seems to show that an acute logician does not always perceive how different an argument looks from the other side of the question. The matter, as More and Egerton considered, ought to have been 'impossibilitated.' Donne hoped, perhaps, that by the help of his persuasive tongue and his distinguished friends the matter would be smoothed over, and the marriage become a help instead of a hindrance to his fortunes. Egerton, however, refused to reinstate the secretary, even at More's request; and More, though he forgave as a Christian, declined as a man of

business to make his daughter an allowance. Donne's own fortune had disappeared. Years of hardship and suffering followed, and it is pleasant to find that Donne in one way took the position as a man should. A man of baser nature might have punished the cause of his suffering by moody ill-temper. Donne observes in the midst of his troubles, that as he had 'transplanted his wife into a wretched pasture,' he was bound to conceal his depression from her and do all he could to cheer her. His love is shown in a striking poem, which, in spite of some strange incongruities, made Lamb's voice tremble when he read it. The famous story of the 'thought-transference,' which made him aware in France of her dangerous illness in England, may prove, even to a sceptic, that his mind was dwelling upon her; and all that we hear testifies to the strength of his devotion. Poor Mrs. Donne, indeed, had a hard time of it. In fifteen years of marriage she bore twelve children, of whom five died in her lifetime. Her health broke down, and though she saw the beginning of prosperity, she remains a pathetic though a faintly-perceived image of suffering and anxiety compensated by devoted love. It is essential to keep this in mind if we are to do bare justice

to Donne. A sickly wife and a growing family imply cares which must have haunted Donne, himself 'neurotic' and often in bad health, even when he buried himself in his books, or was over head and ears in controversies with learned Jesuits. His prospects depended entirely upon his power of attracting patrons: and (taking for granted all proper apologies about the manners of the times) the story is not altogether attractive. Donne flattered with a will. The great Duchess of Bedford was praised by other poets, such as Jonson and Daniel, and, we will hope, deserved it. Donne was certainly not last in the race for adequate hyperboles. To commend oneself to the successful courtiers in the days of James I. was a process which involved some trial of self-respect. Lord Carlisle, the best of the race, was apparently a real friend; but when we find some declaring that he lives upon the bounty of the now infamous Somerset; and when, after Somerset's fall, he shows his courtier's instinct by hanging on to Buckingham, the weakness becomes unpleasant. Happily, the charge that he wrote a certain repulsive document in support of Somerset has been fully disproved. But with all excuses, enough remains to show that Donne was not above

extricating himself from his difficulties by the methods familiar to the courtiers of the time. The most singular case was that of Sir Robert Drury. Drury, a man of great wealth, lost an only daughter in her fifteenth year. Donne had never seen the girl, but hearing of the father's grief composed a 'funeral elegy,' declaring, among other things, that death could—

> 'Find nothing after her so great to kill,
> Except the world itself so great as she.'

The gratified father at once gave Donne a room in his great house in Drury Lane, and afterwards took him for a companion on a foreign tour. Donne carried on his hyperboles in two successive poems, commemorating anniversaries of the child's death, and rashly promised an annual celebration. His friends were scandalised by his outrageous compliments, and Ben Jonson told him that the poems might have been appropriate if addressed to the Virgin Mary. Donne argued that he was at liberty to treat Miss Drury as the ideal woman without reference to fact. The poems may be a warning that we must not infer genuine autobiography from his utterances, for, if the truth had been unknown, injudicious critics might have constituted a romance out of lines intended simply

to attract a patron. They hardly suggest, indeed, real feeling, although they are very curious illustrations of Donne's 'metaphysical' subtleties, and contain some of his most striking phrases. Meanwhile, it is singular, as Mr. Gosse points out, that Drury vanishes entirely from Donne's life, and is hardly mentioned in his letters. Possibly, as a cynic might observe, the explanation is to be guessed from Drury's relation to Donne's contemporary, Joseph Hall. Drury had patronised Hall, and Hall, as he tells us, had given him up because another patron offered more liberal terms.

Donne's hopes were long fixed on secular preferment. Some great man was to make him Secretary to the Virginia Company, or Ambassador at Venice; and yet, in spite of worries and ambitions, he was still immersed in his favourite studies. He was learning the 'Eastern tongues,' reading Spanish divines and poets, and following religious controversy, besides turning out an occasional 'epithalamium' or elegy. One occupation suggests a problem. From 1605 to 1607, Donne, as Mr. Gosse thinks, was chiefly employed in what lawyers would call 'devilling' for the learned Dr. Morton, who was arguing with the Jesuits, and in 1607 was rewarded by the Deanery of

Gloucester. Many years afterwards, Morton, then Bishop of Durham, reported to Walton a conversation with Donne. Morton proposed upon his preferment to resign to another benefice, in order that Donne might take orders and succeed to it. Donne refused upon the ground that according to the casuists a man ought not to take orders unless the glory of God were his first end. Though he had repented of certain 'irregularities,' men would remember them, and think that he was really moved by the desire for an income. Mr. Gosse remarks that the account is 'far too circumstantial not to be in the main correct,' and inclines to think that Morton spoke from notes taken at the time. I confess that I cannot quite follow this. The more 'circumstantial' an old gentleman of seventy-six (at least) is about events a third of a century old, the less I believe in his exactness, and, when his statement is transmitted through a third person, given to edifying embroidery, the evidence becomes exceedingly shadowy.[1] Yet Mr. Gosse, accepting the state-

[1] Morton was ninety-four when Walton published this story, but, as Mr. Beeching points out, it may have been told eighteen years earlier. The whole speech appears to me to be as obviously a bit of literary composition as one of the speeches in a classical historian. It represents a general impression.

ment as Morton's, thinks that Morton misunderstood Donne. Donne's real reason must have been that he was still 'hardly an Anglican.' I confess that I am not convinced, though this is one of the psychological puzzles which must remain doubtful. Anyhow, the conversation, authentic or not, suggests a very natural ground for hesitation. Donne, as I read him, was a man full of scruples, intellectual and moral; morbidly sensitive to the opinions of his fellows, and aware that if he had taken orders, all the courtiers, and most of his friends, would have given the obvious reason—Here is a man in difficulties, taking orders in order to escape them. Mr. Gosse incidentally calls Donne a man of 'stalwart will.' The phrase strikes me as inappropriate. Donne was a man of overpowering impulses, but little self-control; not with one strong will, but with many conflicting wills. His whole career was forced upon him, not carved out by his own taste. His thirst for learning was crossed by a thirst for pleasure; the impulse which led him to marry and upset all his prospects, had made him a dependent, appealing to any patron towards whom he was drifted, anxious to turn any of his talents to account, and certainly in some ways not over-

scrupulous. And yet, his remorse for irregularities and his obvious thirst for sympathy and respect, would naturally make him shrink from a step certain to be misinterpreted—if, indeed, we should not rather say, to be too truly interpreted. Donne's ordination would scarcely have been ascribed to a genuine 'vocation,' though now, as always, profoundly interested in dogmatic discussion. In short, if he had taken orders, we could hardly have doubted that the main motive was of the worldly kind, and the belief that his other hopes would now be realised. Donne, I suspect, saw that very clearly, and shrank from the reproach. Moreover, the cynic must again intrude the remark that the proposed preferment was in Yorkshire, and would have fixed Donne to his remote country living, far away from his great friends at Court. His writings at this time seem to illustrate his state of mind, for after helping Morton, he published his *Pseudo-Martyr* in 1610 —a kind of corollary from the previous controversy. The point under debate was the Oath of Allegiance, which Catholics refused to take. A popular disputant might have defended the oath on the simple ground that the recusants were spies and traitors—if they were hanged, it would serve

them right. That, no doubt, would not persuade Catholics, but it might excuse Protestant zeal. Donne takes a remoter point. The recusants, he says, were not genuine martyrs, because, on their own principles the Pope had no right to suspend the law which they were breaking. Donne's merit was acknowledged by an Oxford degree, and his book at once recognised, says Dr. Jessopp, as the 'most solid and masterly contribution' to a controversy already carried on by our most learned divines. It is plain, however, that 'learned divines' alone could be much interested. Catholics would hold that they were better judges than Donne of their own dogmas, and Protestants care nothing for the recusants' way of settling their own scruples. The book might prove that Anglicans could be as learned and logical as Papists, but for practical purposes was mere by-play. But with this is connected the curious book called *Biathanatos*. It is a defence of the proposition that in some cases suicide might be not under all circumstances sinful. The doctrine seemed to be so scandalous that Donne kept the book in manuscript and showed it only to a few trusted friends. It has, moreover, scandalised later critics, who have urged in extenuation that the argument

was 'idealist only.' I fully subscribe to Mr. Gosse's view that this implies misconception. Donne had excellent reasons for interest in the question. If 'suicide' means voluntary death, suicides include all the martyrs and heroes who deserve our heartiest admiration. How are we to draw the line between the man who prefers death by torture to telling a lie, and the gentleman who shot himself rather than give up buttered muffins? Both choose death, though one earns adoration and the other contempt, and yet one case shades into the other by imperceptible degrees. Now, Donne was discussing exactly this point in respect of the Jesuits. Did the sufferers in his own family, the men of whom they had been proudest, deserve the crown of martyrdom, or were they traitors who had got their deserts? He was arguing against all his early associations, and no wonder that his argument suggested a problem. It had clearly, too, a personal application. Donne, in his troubles, thought, he tells us himself, of seeking refuge in death. It pleased him, he says, to reflect that he had 'the keys of his prison in his own hand,' a reflection which anticipates some recent pessimists. He wished, as Mr. Gosse says, to hold that if ever he should yield to the impulse,

he might still be free from deadly sin. Nothing, at any rate, can be more characteristic than his mode of solving the problem. It was the finest imaginable case of casuistry. He goes to the civil law and the canon law, and distinguishes between positive suicide when you seek death, and negative suicide when you let death seek you, and provides a whole armoury of subtle legal distinctions which it would be very difficult to call up at the moment of temptation. There was a strain of the Hamlet in Donne, and Hamlet would have been still more puzzled whether to be or not to be if he had been as well crammed as Donne with whole bodies of casuistical divinity.

This, I fancy, gives us a significant glimpse into this most complex and perplexing character. His early errors of morality suggest at once defiance and remorse. His romantic love suggests gratitude for the blessings and repentance for the blunder. His poetical impulses are confused and distorted by his philosophy. His intellect, amazingly nimble and discursive rather than powerful, stimulates a boundless curiosity which tends to overwhelm his reason under vast masses of learning. He reminds us of Bacon by his fertility of illustration, and oddly enough seems, as Mr.

Gosse points out, to have been more receptive than Bacon of the new astronomy of Kepler and Galileo. And yet he remains hopelessly buried in the scholastic system upon which Bacon was pronouncing sentence. He wanders in a vast labyrinth of speculation instead of striking at once to the heart of the problem. Though his early prejudices drop off, he only sidles and shifts by slow degrees and with infinite complications into the Anglican position, always holding to its continuity with Catholicism. His life is as distracted and dependent as his thought. He cannot fairly decide to be the divine, and apologises for his want of learning while he is displaying learning enough for a whole bench of bishops. The Court still charms and fascinates the accomplished flatterer, and he cannot help hoping that one of the great favourites to whom he can make himself so acceptable will, at last, lift him out of his troubles. All the time the poor man is ' neurotic,' troubled by ill-health, weighed down by family cares, and driven to speculate upon the ethics of suicide. The knot of these tangled difficulties was at last to be cut, and by the most appropriate *deus ex machina*. Nobody was better qualified than James I. to appreciate Donne's abilities, and

for once at least the wisdom of our Solomon dictated judicious action. Donne himself was characteristically undecided. He had, in 1612, introduced himself to Somerset by a petition. That worthy nobleman would, he hoped, add to his many services to religion by patronising a new divine. Somerset, at the eve of his fall, consented to recommend his client for a clerkship of the Council. James judiciously told Donne in an interview, reported with abundant 'rose-colour' by Walton, that he was better fitted to be a preacher. Donne consented — after some final hesitation — and in a couple of months was ordained. The effect upon Donne was decisive. Walton glows with fervour as he records the result. The Church of England had gained 'a second St. Austin.' He had a 'new calling, new thoughts, and a new employment for his art and eloquence; now all his earthly affections were changed into divine love, and all the faculties of his own soul were engaged in the conversion of others.' Donne, the wit, the poet, and the courtier, was sublimed into the saint, and a burning and shining light of the Church. Are we to reduce or qualify this ardent panegyric? That raises a rather delicate question. Walton holds,

I take it, that Donne was already a saint potentially, and, at this point, finally cast off the impediments which had bound him to the world and covered his light under a bushel. Now, I do not doubt the continuity of Donne's development. Even a 'conversion,' which to the man himself seems to imply a change of nature, often seems to outsiders to imply merely a change in the direction of his energies. Yet the striking thing is often the resemblance of the new man to the old. The change in Donne at this crisis of his life was certainly not a transformation of character. It is quite impossible to doubt the sincerity of his belief in his creed, or the depth of his religious sentiment. That, again, is enough to justify a good Anglican like Walton in inferring that he was a saint. Unfortunately, this is not exactly my position. A man, I fancy, may most sincerely believe all the thirty-nine articles, and be deeply religious, and yet be a bigot and a sour and selfish fanatic, content to save his own soul and to resign himself, complacently or savagely, to the damnation of his fellow-creatures. He may be an ascetic whom we may respect for his conquest of the lower appetites, and whom we may yet hold to be making a dark prison-house of the world. Or

he may be a man full of the love of his fellows, and really doing his best to rouse them to the pursuit of higher ideals. A strong religious feeling implies that a man is not merely frivolous or indifferent; but it may be totally misguided or may be really composed of some very objectionable ingredients which, without conscious hypocrisy, may be disguised in the general result. Now, Donne's religion, like his poetry, seems to be singularly difficult to analyse. His sincerity does not prove that it did not include some elements rather repulsive than admirable. One point seems to be implied by the obvious facts of his life. Donne did not become one of the saints who find it necessary to renounce altogether the career which they have hitherto pursued. He did not retire to a cloister. He accepted preferments, and though we must of course admit the normal reference to the 'standard of the age,' he does not appear to have been more or less averse than other clergymen of the day to a comfortable addition to his income, involving no increase of duty. According to one of Walton's anecdotes, he showed a creditable reluctance to accept an addition to his fortune when it was uncertain whether he would live to discharge the

duties of his position. One little incident strikes one rather disagreeably. In 1623, Donne married his eldest daughter, then only twenty, to Edward Alleyn, the founder of Dulwich, who was fifty-eight, and had lost his first wife just six months before. The affair was transacted in a purely commercial spirit, and led to some quarrelling over money matters. One cannot avoid the reflection that Donne had passed a little too completely out of the state of mind in which he had committed his own 'remarkable error.' Men, however, married their daughters in those days as they let their farms, and it would be unfair to dwell upon such matters. Donne, it is enough to say, was not retiring to a hermitage, but becoming an eloquent divine on the road to a bishopric. But a real and serious change came over him by degrees. In 1617, the patient, suffering wife was taken from him; and Donne was a man to feel the whole force of the blow. Preferments and success and life itself, he knew too well, would be henceforth sad and colourless. A dangerous illness in 1623 brought him to the brink of the grave. Mr. Gosse has brought out the personal significance of the 'devotions' which he composed at the time. He describes with singular vividness the fears and

fancies which distract him as he lies unable to sleep, listening to the clock or trying to divine the opinion of his physicians. They are unable to give morphia, but 'apply pigeons to draw the vapours from his head.' If, however, the treatment was antiquated, the emotions of the patient were modern, and, indeed, also ancient enough. Singular conceits still occur to him: they were strange enough and would mix well with delirious dreams; but no one could lay bare more effectively the emotions which must rise in all ages to an exquisitely sensitive nature lying in an antechamber of death. We see already the Donne who a few years later was to rise from his deathbed, and, standing in his shroud, to be drawn for the ghastly portrait, which stood by his bed during his last hours. The same figure is represented by the statue in St. Paul's. A few weeks had then passed since Donne, as Walton puts it, had preached his own funeral sermon. His friends, as they saw him in the pulpit, thought that he could only 'preach mortality by a decayed body and a dying face.' He was, however, able to speak, though in a 'faint and hollow voice and with many tears'; and so ended his strange career most characteristically. If, as Mr. Gosse observes,

there is to us just an overtouch of the dramatic and self-conscious in that matter of the picture, we can see at least how profoundly he impressed Walton and his contemporaries. He was one who, after early errors, had been chastened by long suffering and deep repentance, and had been finally purified from all earthly stains. Baxter, we are told, preached 'as a dying man to dying men.' Walton's description of Donne's preaching might suggest that the phrase was applicable to Donne. We are told how deeply he was in earnest; how his hearers wept with him; how some were 'carried to heaven in holy raptures,' and others enticed to amendment by 'a sacred art and courtship'; how he made vice ugly and virtue beautiful, and preached 'like an angel from a cloud,' though not in a cloud himself. We turn from this panegyric to the sermons to verify the impression. The tendency of oratory to fall flat when it is read instead of heard is a commonplace, and we are prepared for some disillusion. Donne tells us himself that a good sign of the times was the 'hunger for hearing.' Elsewhere he speaks of the 'murmuring and noises' made when a preacher had 'concluded a point.' They often took up, he declares, a quarter of the hour

habitually assigned to a sermon. Donne's own sermons, as printed, stretch sometimes to nearly three times that length; but it seems that he spoke from notes on a carefully prepared scheme, and afterwards expanded and revised for publication. In any case, it is clear that Donne's audiences were prepared to be receptive of pulpit eloquence to a degree not easy now to realise. It is not strange if we find their raptures surpass our own; though we can share one part of their wonder. Donne's sermons, whatever else they may be, are astonishing intellectual feats. In spite of ill-health and many distractions, he published, as Dr. Jessopp counts, one hundred and eighty sermons; each itself rather a short treatise than a brief flight of rhetoric; first elaborated, then spoken, and then elaborately rewritten. As mere exhibitions of learning they are remarkable, and the more so, because Donne does not seem to be turning out a commonplace book, or going out of his way to display learning. He has a mind so full of learning that references crowd in spontaneously. He makes, it may be noticed, few allusions to the classics, but he is thoroughly at home with all the fathers and ecclesiastical history; Augustine is at his fingers' ends, and

St. Bernard is a special favourite. Then he applies Aquinas and the schoolmen; or shows his profound familiarity with the whole Catholic theology of his time; or calls in the Protestant champions, Luther, and Melanchthon, and Calvin; or is attracted by some great writer of the day, now forgotten, such as Collius, who had investigated with untiring industry the posthumous fate of Pagan souls. Evidently his hydroptic thirst has stored his mind with masses of anecdote, argument, and reflection, over which he can range at will whenever he needs an apt illustration. Then, as he quaintly remarks, the pastor must not only distribute 'manna' — fruits known to all — but 'quails,' 'meat of a stronger digestion'—that is, be at home in whole systems of dogmatic and casuistical theology. The congregation is in the mental attitude of students in a professor's lecture-room. The preacher claims the authority of an expert, and speaks as the exponent of the judgments of countless learned doctors. The doctors did not all agree, it is true; but the mere weight of so many great names warns the ignorant that he is not to presume an opinion of his own.

This attitude of mind, the impression that the preacher is condescending from the vantage-ground

of mysterious learning, has become as strange as Donne's political attitude. The King for him is scarcely short of an earthly god. We wonder whether he was perfectly sincere. In one of his most elaborate performances Donne applies a text from Proverbs, saying, that the King shall be the friend of him 'that loveth pureness of heart.' In a glowing peroration this is applied to James.[1] Donne, of course, includes purity of doctrine, to which James might make a claim; but nobody knew better than Donne what was the moral purity of the favourites who had been rewarded by James's friendship. Neither he nor his congregation, we must presume, looked too closely; but Donne, if he turned over a certain satire which lay in his desk, might have remembered that such a panegyric might be turned into the bitterest irony.

But, putting this aside, we must admit another point. Donne's learning is, after all, subsidiary to a marvellous intellectual activity. In his poems the dialectical subtlety seems to fetter him. The fancy is condensed as well as constrained. He seems to labour till he can squeeze the imaginative

[1] 'The Court of James I.,' says Hallam, 'was incomparably the most disgraceful scene of profligacy which this country has ever witnessed.'

impulse into a logical formula at the price of crabbed obscurity. But in the prose the two faculties play freely into each other's hands. There is a crowd and rush of thoughts and illustrations. His subtle intellect evolves endless distinctions and startling paradoxes and quaint analogies so abundantly, that he might apparently have preached for a week as easily as for an hour. He takes up one fancy after another, and revels in various applications till the display becomes astonishing. His most famous predecessor, Andrewes, was perhaps equally learned and logically subtle; but—so far as I have been able to get, not, I confess, very far—his desire to be logically convincing overweights him and keeps him to the earth. Jeremy Taylor, Donne's greatest successor, can yield frankly to his imagination, and takes daring flights into the region of pure poetry. Donne represents the fusion of the two faculties. He conscientiously begins his sermons by laying down his logical framework. Any text on his method may serve, as he says of one, for introducing a lecture upon grammar logic, ethic, rhetoric, or philosophy; though, of course, every clause, or even single word, may have to be strangely tortured and sublimated

in the process. The style, again, is essentially logical, perfectly clear, and thoroughly articulate even in the longest sentences, now that he has not to force his words into metrical fetters. It is thoroughly alive; never flagging, relaxed, or clumsy, however elaborate. He is specially master of one device. He reaches a climax, as you suppose, and that only leads to another more surprising, and so to a third, which eclipses its predecessors. Or sometimes a sentence contains an accumulation of apparent synonyms, intended to make the idea flash new sparkles from different facets. Donne, at least, never goes to sleep, and the alertness and versatility indicated is constantly surprising.

This, of course, involves the string of quibbles and conceits which would strike a modern congregation sometimes as puerile and sometimes as profane. He can take suggestions from all manner of topics. He can at times appeal to mathematical analogies. He has been amused by the remark that you have only to join the ends of a flat map to make east coincide with west, and more than once uses it for edification. The natural history of those days, whose animals seem to come partly out of folk-lore and partly from

*Æsop's Fables*, offers delightful suggestions. One of his most singular passages relates to the well-known fact (used also in his *Progress of the Soul*) that the mouse is a deadly enemy of the elephant. It creeps up the elephant's trunk and 'gnaws the life-cords.' This is applied to the relations between man and the Being who made him out of nothing, 'which is infinitely less than a mathematical point.' Can man dare to be at enmity with his Creator, 'who is not only a multiplied elephant, millions of elephants multiplied into one, but a multiplied world, a multiplied all, all that can be conceived by us, infinite many times over?' Do modern preachers regret, I wonder, that they are not allowed such extravagances, which at least would be fatal to slumbers, or rejoice that such efforts are not expected of them? Anyway, with so wide a field, Donne had ample opportunities for startling his hearers and stimulating their attention. Whatever the eccentricities, each sermon plays round some definite central thought, and has a certain unity through the endless ramifications of exuberant illustration. Such performances might be amazing feats of intellectual juggling; but could they produce 'raptures' and 'tears'? I can manage to believe it, though I

must confess that I have to take it rather on trust. It wants an effort to suppose that the sense of man's littleness in the Universe could be really driven home by comparing the Creator to a 'multiplied elephant.' If a man were not shocked by the incongruity, he might recognise a true sentiment, which, uttered in a different dialect, may still impress us all at times. But, then, if we strip off the subtleties, we are apt to come upon a commonplace, and at last must confess that a good many of Donne's refinements suggest rather a yawn than a rapture. If, however, we deliberately make the effort, get back as well as we can to the seventeenth century, and try to get up a rapture, we can perhaps understand, though it is difficult quite to sympathise. There are passages enough in which Donne reveals his heart, and the veil of subtlety becomes transparent. Using a comparison generally attributed to Newton, he speaks of the worthlessness of mere human wisdom, and says that men who have followed by this light 'all the ways both of wisdom and of craft, have got no further than to have walked by the side of a tempestuous sea, and to have gathered pebbles and speckled cockle-shells.' There, happily, his faculty for analogies stops,

within legitimate bounds, and the phrase illustrates the vein in which we can really imagine Donne to have moved tears as well as wonder. Showing here and there throughout the subtlety and the learning and the controversy, we have glimpses of the ghastly figure which preached his own funeral sermon. Donne, indeed, represents that strangely materialist view of death, the dwelling upon corruption and the physically repulsive, characteristic of the time. Inevitably it leads him into queer speculations, as, for example, into the problem how the body is to be put together after it has been assimilated by a fish or a cannibal, and therefore become the common property of two souls. But beneath all this is the strong sentiment which might now be congenial to pessimism. Donne was a saint in the eyes of his hearers, and a saint of the ascetic type. His conscience is still haunted by remorse, tempted to self-torture and disillusionment with the world. The sensual appetites have been conquered, but at the price of constantly fixing his eyes upon the hideous side of things; he thinks of the treachery and the villainy which underlies the decorous outside of the world, and checks the worship of beauty by thoughts of what will happen to beauty

in the grave. There, again, Hamlet in the churchyard gave pithy utterance to a theme which Donne extends into elaborate subtleties, and considers a 'little too curiously.' If he has in some sense found peace and consolation, he has to be always mortifying the flesh and scourging himself to keep down the old man. He meditates upon hell and the gloomy aspect of the world, which preoccupies him and leads to his most effective passages. To give specimens would be difficult, if only on account of the excessive luxuriance of his rhetoric. A singularly fine passage is the peroration to a sermon upon the text, 'He that believeth not shall be damned,' where the real torment of hell is described as the hopeless separation of the soul from God. That, perhaps, of which a slight indication can be most easily given is an appeal to the atheist. He challenges the 'poor, intricated, perplexed, labyrinthical soul' to stand by its creed. If I asked, he says, whether there be a God when you are at church or in the world or at a theatre, you might consider that religion was an invention of priests or poets or rulers. But, he proceeds, 'I respite thee not till the day of judgment, when thou wilt call upon the hills to cover thee; nor till the day of thine own

death, when thou shalt have evidence enough of thy Maker by feeling hell. 'I respite thee but a few hours, but six hours, but till midnight. Wake then, and then, dark and alone, hear God ask thee then, and remember that I asked thee now, Is there a God? And if thou darest, say No!'

This passage must be enough to illustrate the vigour with which Donne can often throw aside his 'mouse and elephant,' and his elaborate refinements on grammatical and logical niceties, and glow with genuine fire, though frequently we have to exclude so much uncongenial matter that our appreciation ceases to be spontaneous. And there is perhaps the final interest of Donne. In one way he has partly become obsolete because he belonged so completely to the dying epoch. The scholasticism in which his mind was steeped was to become hateful and then contemptible to the rising philosophy; the literature which he had assimilated went to the dust-heaps; preachers condescended to drop their doctorial robes; downright common-sense came in with Tillotson and South in the next generation; and not only the learning but the congenial habit of thought became unintelligible. Donne's poetical creed went the

same way, and if Pope and Parnell perceived that there was some genuine ore in his verses and tried to beat it into the coinage of their own day, they only spoilt it in trying to polish it. But on the other side, Donne's depth of feeling, whether tortured into short lyrics or expanding into voluble rhetoric, has a charm which perhaps gains a new charm from modern sentimentalists. His morbid or 'neurotic' constitution has a real affinity for latter-day pessimists. If they talk philosophy where he had to be content with scholastic theology, the substance is pretty much the same. He has the characteristic love for getting pungency at any price; for dwelling upon the horrible till we cannot say whether it attracts or repels him; and can love the 'intense' and super-sublimated as much as if he were skilled in all the latest æsthetic canons. People sometimes talk as if pessimism were a new invention. It is merely a new way of saying the old things. The good old hearty belief in the devil had certainly one advantage: it enabled a gloomy person to cover his misanthropical sentiments by an edifying mask. The conviction that man's nature is corrupt, and that the great majority will be damned, enabled you to discharge your melancholy and yet ostensibly to

believe that everything was for the best. Now that the devil has gone out of fashion, the pessimist cannot find even a verbal excuse for his mismanagements of 'Nature,' and has to appear in his true character. It is, in fact, the affinity of Donne to such teaching which suggests a certain ambiguity in the eulogies bestowed upon his religion. His view may be right or wrong; but it implies something very unlike the amiable and optimistic view of the universe which seems to be generally taken as religious by modern preachers.

# JOHN RUSKIN

Ruskin's death, as we all agreed, deprived us of the one man of letters who had a right to burial in Westminster Abbey. We may rejoice that his representatives preferred Coniston. The quiet churchyard in a still unpolluted country was certainly more appropriate for him than the 'central roar' of what he somewhere calls 'loathsome London.' But the general consent marks the fact that Ruskin had come to be recognised as a compeer of the greatest writers of the age. By many he is also revered as one who did more than almost any contemporary to rouse the sluggish British mind from its habitual slumber. His career, indeed, suggests many regrets. His later writings are too often a cry of despair and vexation of spirit. The world is out of joint, and all his efforts to set it right have failed. To those who cannot quite agree that we are all driving post-haste to the devil, the pessimism may seem

to indicate the want of intellectual balance which did much to waste surpassing abilities. But if his vagaries are sometimes provoking, at any rate they are always interesting. Though my intellectual idols in old days were of a different school, I was never so dull as to be indifferent to the curious fascination of his books. I have been refreshing my memory of them lately, and if I cannot profess myself an ardent disciple, I have at least read with renewed or increased admiration of his literary power. One excellence is conspicuous at first sight. The cardinal virtue of a good style is that every sentence should be alive to its fingers' ends. There should be no cumbrous verbiage: no barren commonplace to fill the interstices of thought: and no mannerism simulating emotion by fictitious emphasis. Ruskin has that virtue in the highest degree. We are everywhere in contact with a real human being, feeling intensely, thinking keenly, and, even when rhetorical, writing, not to exhibit his style or his eloquence, but because his heart burns within him. In his later moods, indeed, Ruskin held that he had been at first too much given to the ornate: he had been seduced by his admiration for Hooker to indulge in elaborate long-winded sentences: and he cer-

tainly had a weakness for very deliberate 'purple patches.' That was a venial fault as a young man, and was sufficiently punished by misdirected admiration. People, as he complained, would take him for a coiner of fine phrases, instead of a real philosopher and a serious critic of art. *Modern Painters*, as even an artistic ignoramus could see, was something much more than rhetoric. It was an intellectual feat which becomes more surprising the more one thinks of it. The first volume, we remember, was not only written when he was twenty-three, but when he had had, in some respects, a singularly narrow education. Ruskin, we may note, was at Oxford during the most exciting period of the 'movement.' His ablest contemporaries were all going through the Newman fever. Ruskin seems never to have been aware that such a person as Newman existed. He amused himself with geology and botany, and seems to have been as blind as became the son of a sound Evangelical wine-merchant to the very existence of any spiritual ferment. That might seem to prove that he cared nothing for intellectual speculations. Yet within a year or two he was writing a book of which it may be said that no work produced by an English author of the

same period of life has ever done so much to set people thinking in a fresh direction. The generous desire to do justice to Turner, which prompted the book, led, I suppose, to the most triumphant vindication of the kind ever published. In any case, the argument was so forcibly put as to fall like a charge of dynamite into the camp of the somnolent critics of the day. The book, whatever its errors, is, I fancy, the only one in the language which treats to any purpose what is called æsthetics. It is amusing to notice what difficulty the young critic has in finding any previous authorities to confute. He goes back to Locke's essay, and Burke on the 'Sublime and Beautiful,' and Alison on 'Taste,' and the papers by Reynolds in Johnson's *Idler*, which have also, as he remarks, the high sanction of their editor. In truth, English speculation on such matters was nearly a blank. Untrammelled by any solemn professors of æsthetics, Ruskin could be all the fresher; and perhaps the better able to impress readers who were neither philosophical nor æsthetic. People who shared the indifference to art of those dark ages (I can answer for one) were suddenly fascinated, and found to their amazement that they knew a book about pictures

almost by heart. They did not foresee the day in which a comfortable indifference to artistic matters, instead of being normal and respectable, would be pitiable and almost criminal. Ruskin, no doubt, gave the first impulse to the change.

His popular reputation was partly due to the passages which a severe taste can only just approve. Yet the worst one can say of such famous bits of rhetoric as the comparison of Claude's skies with Turner's is that they approach Shelley's finest imagery too nearly for prose. The rhetoric rests, in any case, upon some remarkable qualities. His defence of Turner is mainly an exposition of Turner's truthfulness to nature, and shows that his eulogist is qualified to judge of his fidelity. Ruskin has watched sky and sea and mountains so closely, that he is revolted by the old conventional portraits and demonstrates his point with extraordinary fulness of knowledge. He surpasses the average critic in that respect as a scientific specialist surpasses a mere popular observer. Ruskin, indeed, took himself to have a specially scientific mind. So far as aptitude for science means power of observation, the claim, I imagine, was perfectly justified. He came in later years to detest science 'in the lump,'

and to speak of leaders of science with unfortunate arrogance. But his power of seeing the phenomena vividly was as remarkable as his power, not always shared by scientific writers, of making description interesting. I owe him a personal debt. Many people had tried their hands upon Alpine descriptions since Saussure; but Ruskin's chapters seemed to have the freshness of a new revelation. The fourth volume of *Modern Painters* infected me and other early members of the Alpine Club with an enthusiasm for which, I hope, we are still grateful. Our prophet indeed ridiculed his disciples for treating Mont Blanc as a greased pole. We might well forgive our satirist,[1] for he had revealed a new pleasure, which we might mix with ingredients which he did not fully appreciate. The power of giving interest and fascination even to dry geological details was no doubt due to the singular fervour of his nature-worship. One pardons a lover for some excess of

[1] I will venture to add a reminiscence. Ruskin was induced by his friend, St. John Tyrwhitt, to attend a dinner of the Alpine Club about 1868. He declined to speak, and at first looked upon us, I think, as rather questionable characters; but he rapidly thawed and became not only courteous, but cordially appreciative of our motives. I think that he called us 'fine young men'! At any rate he joined the Club and was a member for many years, although, of course, he could still speak very frankly of our frailties.

interest even in the accessories of his mistress's charms. How Ruskin's passion for nature was developed by his surroundings may be learnt from many of his most interesting reminiscences. But the surroundings worked upon innate predispositions which must have been almost unique. He speaks in *Modern Painters* of his 'intense joy, mingled with awe,' when his nurse took him to Friar's Crag on Derwentwater. It was 'comparable only to the joy of being near a noble and kind mistress'—and equally inexplicable. Long afterwards he tells us how, as a boy, he would pass entire days rambling on 'Cumberland hillsides or staring at the lines of surf on a low sand,' and traces his whole power of judging in art to the habit thus acquired. In this quality, and in this alone, he was, he thinks, remarkable as a child. Most children have a certain taste for ponds and rocks, as offering romantic chances of dirt and danger, and as the habitat of things catchable, and partly, if they are imaginative, as probable haunts of pirates and Robinson Crusoes. Those are surely rare who, as Ruskin tells us of himself, found a 'strange delight' in getting a 'land-line cutting against the sky.' Wordsworth was another recorded instance, and Ruskin himself compares this

early passion to that which prompted the famous ode. Heaven lies about us in our infancy, if we happen to be Wordsworths or Ruskins, and till he had grown to manhood its indulgence gave him a pleasure infinitely greater than he had since found in anything. This enthusiasm, however psychologists may explain it, not only gave charm to Ruskin's early writings, but gave the substance of the æsthetic doctrine to which, as he observes rather ruefully, people would pay no attention. He set out with the intention of systematically expounding a theory of the beautiful. Unfortunately, he had one infirmity fatal to such an attempt. He was incapable of arranging his thoughts in orderly symmetrical pigeon-holes: his mind was essentially discursive: he could see things more vividly than any one, and could argue acutely and ingeniously; but he had never the patience to consider how his thoughts should be co-ordinated and wrought into consistent unity. The *Modern Painters*, we know, could never be really completed at all, because he was attracted by all manner of irrelevant and collateral issues. In later years his incapacity for consecutive writing becomes bewildering. You can never tell in reading a lecture whether the next paragraph will

take you to questions of religion or art or social evils or autobiography. In a letter to Carlyle in 1855 he humorously declares that he is reading German metaphysics, poetry, political economy, cookery, music, geology, dress, agriculture, horticulture, and navigation all at once, which, as he observes, 'takes time.' No human intellect, one might add, performing such rapid flights from topic to topic, could ever get any of them fairly worked out. A letter from an unnamed friend, which he published in the *Fors Clavigera*, suggests a partial explanation. 'You can,' said this frank critic, 'see an individual concrete fact better than any man of the generation; but an invisible fact, an abstraction, . . . you have, I fancy, been as incapable of seeing as of seeing through a stone wall.' With necessary deductions from the judgment of a candid friend there is, I fancy, much truth in this. Ruskin was too much absorbed in the individual and concrete to be a good system-monger. Intellectually, he resembles a short-sighted man to whom every detail is so abnormally vivid in turn that he forgets the whole. He has to make his theories—if theories he must have—not by patient induction, but by flashes of intuition. His theory of the beautiful simply

formulates his own childish instincts. Wordsworth had seen, we know, in his own early feelings a proof of the soul's pre-existence 'with God, who is our home.' So Ruskin, though he somewhere calls this fanciful, regards the sense of beauty as a revelation—as something like the inner light of mystics. All natural beauty, he says, is 'typical of the divine attributes'; and he tries to show in detail how the sense of beauty corresponds to a perception of Infinity, Order, Symmetry, Unity, and so forth, and how the external world is thus a divinely appointed system of symbols, dimly recognised even in childhood. This theory, no doubt, is as good as others. Like others, indeed, which present themselves as a direct inspiration of the prophet, it may fail to convince opponents; and the elaboration into a symmetrical system must not be taken too seriously. Ruskin quaintly remarks how hard he found it to prevent his *Seven Lamps of Architecture* from becoming eight or nine upon his hands. No doubt his first follower, if he had found one, would have redistributed his symbols, and interpreted various objects to mean entirely different truths. It should be taken, as we take Wordsworth's ode, not as a prosaic argument, but as an imaginative way of expressing his

own sentiments. If disputable as a general theory, it shows what the love of nature meant for Ruskin. To him it seemed to be a part of religion; and a description is for him not a mere catalogue of forms and colours and sensations, but a divine language to be interpreted by the 'high instincts' (if I may quote the inevitable ode again) before which our mortal nature trembles like a guilty thing surprised. To read the true meaning of these outward and visible signs is the function of what he calls the 'theoretic faculty'; and, parenthetically, I may add that his theory, good or bad in itself, leads him to very interesting literary criticisms. I do not know whether the chapters in which he discusses the 'theoretic' faculty or imagination will pass muster with later psychologists better than his theory of the beautiful with professors of æsthetics. But I never read anything which seemed to me to do more than these chapters to make clear the true characteristics of good poetry. Ruskin's critical judgments are certainly not always right; no critic can always judge rightly, unless at the cost of being thoroughly commonplace, and Ruskin is often wayward and sometimes extravagant. But his sense of what was excellent was so keen and genuine,

and he could often analyse his impressions so subtly, that I have seemed to myself (perhaps it was an illusion) to have really learnt something from his remarks.

Ruskin's theory suggested many difficulties—which, indeed, is the chief use of a theory. Contemporary critics condemned him and his clients, the Pre-Raphaelites, as 'realists.' He was taken to hold, that is, that the merit of a work of art was measurable entirely by the quantity of 'truth' which it contained. I fancy that the employment of the word 'truth,' when what is really meant is 'likeness,' leads to as many fallacies as any known misuse of language. It seems, in particular, to make a moral duty of what is a simple question of artistic method. In the *Modern Painters* he is constantly struggling against this interpretation, though he never gets the point quite clear. There is a difficulty in carrying out the theory consistently. The painter, it seems, is to give the facts pure and simple, but then it is just because the facts signify ideas. The greater the realism, though it may sound paradoxical, the greater the idealism. If, indeed, the 'love of nature'—the intense joy and awe which Ruskin and Wordsworth felt in their early days—be interpreted to mean that the natural

scenery which Turner painted is symbolic of divine truths, the closer the imitation the fuller will be the revelation. But when Ruskin is showing the marvellous accuracy of Turner's perceptions, he seems to become simply scientific or prosaic. Turner's merit is explained to be that he instinctively grasped the laws of mountain structure and saw what later geologists tried to explain. It is only by a kind of after-thought that the scenery is made to be somehow edifying and symbolic. There is a greater difficulty behind. After all, is the 'love of nature' so clearly a religious or moral sentiment? In a chapter of *Modern Painters* upon the 'Moral of Landscape,' Ruskin tries, with great ingenuity, to show that the passion is at any rate congenial to the highest moral feelings. Yet he betrays some doubt. With Byron, the 'love of nature'—if we are to take his word for it—was a corollary of his misanthropy. He loved the deep and dark blue ocean precisely because it has a pleasant way of sending man shivering and howling to his gods. Is not that the logical view? To love rock and stream precisely for their wildness surely means that you dislike the garden and the field which are useful to human beings. The love of nature, as interpreted by Rousseau and his

followers, meant, in fact, a condemnation of civilised man, not misanthropy, indeed, but a conviction of the thorough corruption of men as they are—whatever we may hope for men as they are to be.

When, in the *Modern Painters*, Ruskin tried to extend his theory from the beauty of inanimate nature to the beauty of organised beings, he felt this difficulty. Some animals, and many men, are undoubtedly ugly. If they are symbolic of anything, it is of something the very opposite of divine—of sensuality, greed, and cruelty. In the language of his Evangelical days, Ruskin regards this as a result of the 'Adamite fall.' As the love of nature is essentially a part of religion, he naturally comes to a theory which identifies the 'æsthetic' with the moral or religious instinct, and scandalised many people who did not wish their love of art to be trammelled by any crotchets of morality. The change from the Ruskin of the *Modern Painters* to the Ruskin of the later days is, of course, marked by the development of this feeling. The vileness of man, instead of the beauties of nature, becomes his chief preoccupation. In the early volumes he is not only enthusiastic, but seems to count upon the enthusiasm

of his readers. He is exultingly smiting the Philistine hip and thigh with a certain complacency; and the good time is coming in which Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites will be duly honoured. The fervid rhetoric is the natural language of one who is leading a band of followers to the promised land. Something gradually changed; not his character, but his habitual tone of feeling. In his natural temper, he tells us, he had most sympathy with Marmontel;[1] in his 'enforced and accidental temper,' with Swift. If any one asks how Swift was soured, there is no want of sufficient explanation. We cannot say of Ruskin that he ever became 'soured': the genial and generous qualities which suggest the comparison to Marmontel were always there; but, certainly, his 'enforced and accidental temper' became only too like Swift's. The modern Englishman was, for him, painfully like the Yahoo. A man hardly becomes a pessimist out of simple logic, and Ruskin had personal sorrows and sufferings, and an exquisitely sensitive and affectionate nature. The intellectual change was,

[1] So Mill tells us in his *Autobiography* that a passage in Marmontel's Memoirs gave him the first help in rousing him from his youthful fit of melancholy.

perhaps, rather effect than cause, but it was, at any rate, characteristic. He was distracted from the *Modern Painters* by the keen interest in architecture which produced the *Stones of Venice* and the *Seven Lamps*. The study gave prominence to a new point of view. In his early work he might pass for a believer in progress. The 'love of nature' is, in some sense, a product of the last century or two; and the modern painters of whom he wrote, with Turner at their head, were, he thought, incomparably superior to Claude or Salvator. But in architecture, he saw decay instead of progress. The ancient buildings, whose glory he set forth, were being recklessly destroyed or 'restored,' and the art of building itself was a thing of the past. Great architecture presupposes continuous traditions and a certain social harmony. The mediæval cathedrals were the product of a spontaneous instinct, in which each man took his part as naturally as the bee in the honeycomb, and thought as little of his separate interests. We have lost the power because society has been disintegrated; instead of a common ideal, we have a dozen conflicting fashions, and depend upon self-seeking architects, and greedy contractors and demoralised workmen. Whatever

may be the true way of stating the relation between art and morals, there is a close connection between good art and sound social conditions. If a people become selfish and brutalised, no national art, at least, can flourish. Far be it from me to attempt an accurate statement; but I cannot doubt that Ruskin's vehement assertions were at least approximations to a most important truth. He was thus in face of a dilemma. Delicate and refined natures, indeed, might shut themselves up in a Tennysonian 'palace of art,' and cultivate ideals as remote as possible from the prosaic ugliness of the modern world. Ruskin's sympathies and moral feelings were too strong. Even in his early writings, he objected to use the word 'æsthetic' because it suggested the effeminate taste which 'ministers to morbid sensibilities.' Like William Morris, on the same grounds, he held that art as a social product could only be renewed by regenerating society itself. That was a tolerably large enterprise, into which he threw himself with, perhaps, more energy than reflection; but which led, at least, to the utterance of some very pungent and much-needed truths.

About 1860 he began his warfare against the creed of the modern world, which for him was

represented by the Political Economists. He was taken to be a dangerous heretic. Readers were so much outraged that Thackeray had to stop 'Unto this Last' in the *Cornhill*, and Froude to decline 'Munera Pulveris' for *Fraser*. The strength of the popular prejudice surprises later readers. For some years we have been flouting the old Political Economists with a scorn as unqualified as the respect with which they were formerly greeted. Ruskin, indeed, had precedents enough for identifying political economy with the degrading and materialising tendencies of modern society. The doctrine had been denounced from its very birth by Conservatives, Socialists, and Radicals of many types as heartily as Ruskin could wish. He declared himself to be an interpreter of Carlyle, to whom, as he said, he owed more than to any one, and who had spoken the whole truth about the matter in *Past and Present*. No one could acknowledge an intellectual debt more loyally and heartily, and Carlyle's philosophy in general, as well as his special denunciations of the 'dismal science,' had clearly a potent influence upon his disciple. The Christian Socialists, too, with whom Ruskin associated, were protesting against the old orthodox doctrine in the same

spirit—to say nothing of other critics who arose within the ranks of the Economists themselves. There was nothing new in the simple fact of a revolt. Carlyle, however, to the ordinary Briton, passed for an eccentric old Diogenes—a railer at things in general, or perhaps a humorist whose misanthropy was half affectation. The Christian Socialists might be treated as amiable and excellent crotchet-mongers, whose philanthropy wanted common-sense. And undoubtedly there was a vulgar version of Political Economy, which used the orthodox phrases ignorantly and blatantly enough, preached an absolute and selfish 'individualism,' and discovered that every scheme of social reform was somehow condemned by inexorable scientific law. Ruskin, therefore, resolved, he tells us, to come to close quarters with pseudo-science; and to make it the 'central work of his life to write an exhaustive treatise upon Political Economy.' He began, apparently, by reading Ricardo and Mill and such other authorities with attention; though with a strong impression that they would turn out to be humbugs. One result was that he attributed to some of his opponents, to J. S. Mill in particular, a complicity with a vulgar version of their doctrines which they alto-

gether repudiated. He should have recognised that Mill could speak as emphatically as himself of the injustice of the actual social order; and sympathised quite as much with the Socialist aspiration, if not with the Socialist solution. There was, undoubtedly, a radical antagonism of principle; but Ruskin was too passionately eager to distinguish between the stupid and selfish opponents, and men whose ability and genuine zeal he ought to have appreciated.[1]

Ruskin struck some sharp blows. The craftsmen still believed implicitly in their Diana of the Ephesians. Carlyle's huge growls had passed over men's heads like distant thunder, too vague to be effective. Ruskin meant to be the lightning, striking distinct and tangible points. He had, as he had showed in his other works, a singular power of putting nasty questions, of hitting weak points, exposing loose and wordy phrases, and generally making himself disagreeable to self-complacent phrasemongers. He succeeded in irritating, if not in convincing. For the time the respectable world shut its ears and kept him out of correct

[1] See *Time and Tide*, p. 167, for an assault upon Mill's 'wilful equivocations.' Ruskin's wrath prevented him from seeing that Mill, as was shown by his approval of 'land nationalisation,' was attacking 'landlordism' as sincerely as his critic.

periodicals. Naturally, he has now the credit which comes to the earlier mouthpieces of a rising sentiment. I cannot believe, indeed, that those 'arrows of the chace'—to adopt his title for his occasional letters — really advanced economics. He could make special points, but not construct a mere scientific theory. His moral sense was in too great a hurry to step in. He could not look at the facts quietly before fulminating his spiritual censures. When, for example, he convinced himself that usury was wicked, he jumped —most generously but most impatiently—to rash and, as I think, absurd conclusions. To tell him that his theory would be fatal to the whole structure of modern industry might convince him that it must be true, for modern industry is one mass of corruption. To me, I confess, his doctrine seems to show that one's conscience may be a dangerous guide unless it condescends to be enlightened by patient and impartial inquiry. We cannot honour too cordially Ruskin's sensibility to social evils, and the vehement hatred of baseness and brutality which inspired his headlong assault. But one result of his errors was that they gave some apparent excuse to the infinitely commoner fault of cultivating indifference.

Ruskin's righteous indignation took, it must be admitted, some very queer forms. 'I will put up with this state of things not an hour longer,' he says in the first letter of the *Fors Clavigera*. The singular series which followed must always be one of the curiosities of literature. No man of genius, in the first place, ever treated his public with such unceremonious frankness. One is often inclined to accept his own view that his style had improved by increased directness and sacrifice of rhetorical ornament. On the other hand, the incapacity for keeping to any line of thought has reached its highest point. The twenty-fifth letter begins, *à propos* to nothing, with a famous receipt for a 'Yorkshire Goosepie,' a Brobdingnagian pie, which engulfs also a turkey, ducks, woodcocks, a hare, and any quantity of spices and butter. He proceeds at once to a description of the British penny, diverges into heraldry, and ends by an account of Edward III.'s fight with the French at Calais. Amazed correspondents, he tells us, inquired into the meaning of this pie, and his answer, though it manages to introduce an assault upon Darwinism, hardly clears the point. One can hardly doubt that the discursiveness and eccentricity were indicative of a morbid irritability of

brain which was to cloud his intellect, and which is the best apology for certain utterances which offended his readers. When a correspondent complained of his speaking of Mill and Mr. Herbert Spencer as 'geese,' he replied that he said so simply because he 'knew a goose when he saw one.' Other phrases show a rudeness strange in one who in personal intercourse was the most courteous of men. When, indeed, he has said something specially sharp, he generally proceeds to insist upon the extreme care and moderation of his language. 'Whatever is set down for you in *Fors*,' he says, 'is assuredly true, inevitable, trustworthy to the uttermost, however strange.' He quaintly admits in a note that he may make a mistake or two upon merely 'accessory points.' Such extravagancies, and there are plenty of them, shocked the critic of well-regulated mind. Matthew Arnold, if I remember rightly, refers to some of them as instances of British crudity. We may forgive them if we take them as due to a physical cause. No doubt, however, he had a tendency to such escapades: he took a pleasure, as he admits somewhere, in a 'freakish' exaggeration of his natural humour. Carlyle used often to qualify his extravagant remarks by

a huge guffaw, which implied that he was only half serious; and Ruskin's sharp sayings were entitled to the same allowance. He is partly soothing himself by equivalents for a good 'mouth-filling' oath, and partly amusing himself by the neatness with which he can hit a weak point.

The *Fors*, however, shows feeling deep and genuine enough. It fully explains his enforced resemblance to Swift. He is as vehement, if neither so coarse nor so pithy. 'I perceive,' he says, 'that I live in the midst of a nation of thieves and murderers; that everybody around me is trying to rob everybody else, and that, not bravely and strongly, but in the most cowardly and loathsome way of lying trade; that "Englishman" is now merely another word for blackleg and swindler; and English honour and courtesy changed to the sneaking and the smiles of a whipped pedlar, an inarticulate Autolycus, with a steam hurdy-gurdy instead of a voice.' He only hopes to 'pluck up some drowned honour by the locks out of this festering mass of scum of the earth and miserable coagulation of frog-spawn soaked in ditch-water.' He follows an equally bitter passage elsewhere by observing that his words are 'temperate and accurate—except in

short-coming of blame.' Our great teachers, he tells us, even Carlyle and Emerson, accept too easily the comforting belief that right will speedily become might. That is not the ordinary view of Carlyle, who was gloomy enough for most of us. Ruskin, in passages like the above, seems to be trying to surpass his master. We are worse, he assures us, than Eccelin of Padua, who slew two thousand innocent persons to maintain his power, whereas we lately slew in cold blood five hundred thousand persons by slow starvation—that is, as he explains, did not prevent a famine in Orissa. The cases are not strictly parallel. In spite of such feats of logic, Ruskin's bitter utterances constantly made you wince. His attacks on modern society might be caricatures, but clearly there were very ugly things to caricature. Whether he bewailed the invasion of country solitudes by railways and suburban villas, or the mean and narrow life of the dwellers in villas, or went further and produced hideous stories of gross brutality in the slums of London or Manchester, he had an unpleasant plausibility. If you tried to reply that such things were not unprecedented, you felt that the line of defence was rather mean, and that even if Ruskin was over-angry you had

no business to be too cool. When I read *Fors* I used always to fancy that I could confute him, and yet to feel uncomfortable that he might be more in the right than was pleasant. The evils which had stung so fine a nature to such wrath must at least be grievous.

How much Ruskin did to awaken people to a sense of social diseases, or how far his diagnosis was correct, is another question. I am only considering the literary aspect. Ruskin is now often compared to his master, and although attempts to compare great writers, and especially to place them in order of merit, are generally vexatious, the relation between the master and his disciple may suggest certain points. In the twenty-five years which preceded Ruskin's assault upon the Economists, Carlyle had been, one may say, the leader of the intellectual opposition. He denounced the prevailing tendencies, one outcome of which was in his dialect the 'pig philosophy' of Utilitarians and Materialists. His disciples were few, and even those who shared his antipathies were often shocked by his rugged idiosyncrasies and what seemed to be his deliberate mannerisms. Yet, considered as a prophet, it seems to me that Carlyle had a far more potent influence upon the

more thoughtful young men of the time than Ruskin ever possessed. He might be grotesque and extravagant, but his influence embodied a more vigorous and coherent philosophy. He had the uncompromising thoroughness of the Puritan, and in this respect was a quaint contrast to his disciple. Carlyle, as a descendant of John Knox, approved of the famous sentiment, 'May the devil fly away with the fine arts!' He sympathised with Cromwell's view of the right method of dealing with cathedrals, and would have been ready enough to smash painted windows and deface the images of saints. Ruskin, who drew his early religious impression from an enfeebled version of Puritanism, was alienated from it precisely by this iconoclastic tendency. Though he never followed Newman, he came to admire mediæval art so warmly that he has some difficulty in explaining why, at a later period, he did not become a Catholic. There was a point of contact, no doubt, in the hatred of the 'pig philosophy' (the word does not represent my own prejudices) and Ruskin's conviction of the desirable subordination of art to morality. Ruskin saw, as he tells us, that art had decayed as much in Catholic as in Protestant countries, and fell back upon a religious creed,

vague enough except as expressing antipathy to scientific materialism. But his version is curiously modified in the process of engrafting the love of the beautiful upon Carlyle's sterner philosophy.

The arrogance of Ruskin's language was partly adopted from Carlyle, and, indeed, is one of the awkward consequences of being an inspired prophet. It is implied in your very position that your opponents are without an essential mental faculty. You do not condescend to argue, but have a direct vision of truth not perceptible to the blind. Carlyle's famous conversion left him facing the 'Everlasting No' of Atheism in a humour of 'indignation and grim fire-eyed defiance.' But he held equally that we must disengage ourselves from the old creeds and legends which were once the embodiment, but had now become mere obstructions to the religious spirit. We must 'clear our minds from cant,' and 'cant' included a great deal that was dear to weaker brethren. Ruskin, without positively dissenting, represents a different sentiment. He really loved the old symbols which to Carlyle appeared to be outworn rags of 'Houndsditch.' It is characteristic that while professing his debt to Carlyle, he associates him (of all people) with George

Herbert, the Anglican divine. He was affected, at times, not only by the sweetness of sentiment of Herbert's poetry, but by the ingenuity in finding everywhere symbols of religious truth. The method becomes characteristic ; as external nature is a divine symbolism, the old religious art, and all great poetry and philosophy, Shakespeare and Dante and Homer and the Book of Genesis, are a kind of mystic adumbration of esoteric truths. The *Tempest* is an allegory ; the labyrinths of Crete and the legend of the Sirens contain profound wisdom. Though he did not read German, he was impressed by the second part of *Faust*, just because it is intolerably allegorical, and has a bearing upon the theory of usury. Quaintly enough, he complains that the greatest men have found it necessary to wrap up their truths in enigmas soluble only by the wise ; and declares that even the parables in the New Testament are 'necessarily misleading' to the profane. When a man interprets books or, as sometimes happens, history by his fancy instead of his understanding, he becomes simply absurd to plain common-sense, unless one gives him credit for not being quite in earnest. But if considered merely as products of graceful fancy, investing tender feeling or sharp

satire with the charm of poetical ingenuity, his discourses sometimes make admirable literature. The very titles of his books, the *Sesame and Lilies* and *Love's Meinie*, and so forth, are promises that his moralising shall be transfigured into the most poetical forms. I do not know that the promise is always kept: the fancies become too palpably arbitrary, and aggravate the strange discursiveness. But the little book which seems to be his most popular, the *Sesame and Lilies*, deserved its success. His style, I think, was at its best. He can still be as eloquent as of old, though less ornate; and, though the argument wanders a little, he manages to give a regular and concentrated expression of his real convictions. The last section in that volume, 'The Mystery of Life and its Arts,' is, to my mind, the most perfect of his essays. Perhaps I am a little prejudiced by its confession, franker than usual, of the melancholy conviction that, after all, life is a mystery: and no solution really satisfactory. It is a good bit of pessimism, especially if you omit the moral at the end.

To most admirers, however, this would hardly be a recommendation. Rather they were drawn to Ruskin because, in spite of the gloomy views

which he shared with Carlyle, he did not give the same impression of 'grim fire-eyed despair.' Carlyle, we used to say, though he could denounce the world, could suggest no remedy. Ruskin, hardly more hopeful in fact, was yet always suggesting a possible regeneration. Wisdom is to be found, though it is strangely hidden away; and the Marmontel side of him comes out in his pictures of a conceivable Utopia. There is something pathetic in the kind of helpless and yet enthusiastic way in which he expounds the scheme of the 'St. George's Company.' He protests that he only undertakes such a task against his will; he would infinitely rather plunge into his favourite studies; he is forced to try to reform the world because the sight of all the wrongs and miseries is a torment to his spirit, and because he can find no one else to share his views or take up the burthen. He showed that he was in earnest by lavish generosity, and managed, at least, to start a museum. He seems to have made an oversight characteristic of nearly all founders of such societies. He began, as they all begin, by acquiring a piece of freehold land. He arranged, which also seems to be a fascinating amusement, for the currency which his followers

were to use when they were established. The difficulty which he never really contemplated was the rather serious one, how the society was to be kept in order. His tenants are to adopt the laws of 'Florence in the fourteenth century'—with some modifications. Above all things, they are to renounce altogether the modern heresies about liberty. Implicit obedience to the 'Master' is to be a first principle. They are to make a curious profession of faith embodying this promise, and they are to keep their vows. They will prosper, he says, because they will all be strictly honest, and their word, therefore, implicitly accepted in all transactions. If the founder of a new society could be sure that all his followers would be perfectly good and absolutely obedient, he would, no doubt, have surmounted the great initial difficulty. He is more likely, it is to be feared, to collect a mixed crowd of fanatics and humbugs, ready to dispute his authority or sponge upon his benevolence. But that is the criticism of cold common-sense, which would be inappropriate. The Utopia served to set forth Ruskin's view of the existing social evils and contrast them with an ideal of a purer and sweeter life. He contrasts a sketch of peasant life from Marmontel with the

gangs of rowdy labourers who, it appears, cultivate Californian fields with the help of the latest machinery; or takes an idyllic story from Gotthelf, the Swiss novelist—unknown, I must confess, to me; or recalls the wholesome Tyrolese peasant whom he has heard singing 'like a robin' in the still uncorrupted mountain-guarded districts. It is the old story of the men of nature contrasted with corruption and luxury. He seems, for a moment, to be in the most congenial surroundings at Assisi, copying Giotto's dream of the marriage of St. Francis to the Lady Poverty. He admits that he does not quite like the look of St. Francis' camel's-hair coat, and doubts whether the Saint's vow of poverty was the right thing. Perhaps, however, a Ruskin in an earlier period might have really founded an order, instead of fondly imagining one; and, perhaps too, it would have illustrated once more the tendency of impossible ideals to stimulate a reaction to corruption. If I were capable of composing 'imaginary conversations,' I should try one between St. Francis and some sound political economist, Malthus for example, and contrast the idealist who scorns all compromise, and proposes to change men into angels off-hand, and the solid matter-of-fact reasoner who perceives

—perhaps too clearly—that we shall not develop wings just yet. Both classes, I take it, are useful, but there can be no doubt which is most beloved. With all Ruskin's waywardness and dogmatism, and hopeless collisions with common-sense, he attracts people who lean to the ideal side—little as he could himself hope to fight victoriously against the great brutal forces of the world. It is tolerably clear that machinery will be made and coal-mines worked, and even that men will take interest for money, for some time to come. But we may hope that steam-engines are not really in deadly antagonism to all virtue and purity and simplicity of life; and that the leaven of Ruskin's teaching may further the desirable reconciliation.

Such problems are beyond me. The real charm of Ruskin will perhaps be most perceptible to the future reader in a region less disturbed by controversy. Ruskin's distaste for the actual world led him often to look fondly to the days of his infancy, when there were still honest merchants and unpolluted fields even at Dulwich, and some people—especially his father and mother—who could lead simple lives of reasonable happiness. People, I observe, have lately acquired a habit

of insisting upon the extraordinary stupidity and selfishness of the last generation. They are good enough sometimes to make allowances for poor people born before the Reform Bill, on the ground that it is unfair for the historian to apply to a rude age the loftier standards of modern life. It is pleasant for the elderly to be reminded that some of their fathers and mothers were really worthy people, though Ruskin's estimate cannot be taken as unbiassed. To say the truth, one has a kind of suspicion that the objects of his reverence would not have appeared to us quite as they do to him. That does not prevent the *Præterita* from being one of the most charming examples of the most charming kind of literature. No autobiographer surpasses him in freshness and fulness of memory, nor in the power of giving interest to the apparently commonplace. There is an even remarkable absence of striking incident, but somehow or other the story fascinates, and, in the last resort, no doubt on account of the unconscious revelation of character. One point is the way in which a singular originality of mind manages to work out a channel for itself, though hedged in by the prejudices of a sufficiently narrow-minded class and an almost overstrained deference to

his elders and his spiritual guides. But it is enough to say here that the book should be acceptable even to those to whom his social and artistic dogmas have ceased to have much significance.

# WILLIAM GODWIN'S NOVELS

Hazlitt has recorded a conversation in which he and his friends discussed an interesting problem: If you were able to summon from the dead any of the great men of old, whom would you select for an interview? The choice is bewilderingly wide, and supposing that a medium limited our selection to Hazlitt's own circle, we might still be a little puzzled. Some would perhaps like to know whether a monologue of Coleridge was really as amazing as his admirers report; others might prefer to listen to the spontaneous and unsophisticated outflow of humour from which Lamb distilled the *Essays of Elia*; and possibly one or two might like to try the flavour of Hazlitt's own incisive and egotistic sallies. One thing, I fancy, is quite clear. Nobody would ask for an hour of William Godwin. His most obvious qualities, a remorseless 'ergotism,' squeezing the last drops out of an argument; a frigid dogmatism, not

redeemed by the fervour which half excuses fanaticism; and a singular incapacity for even suspecting the humorous or fanciful aspects of life, are qualities which go far to make the superlative bore. They may be harmless or even advantageous in a man who wishes to compose a political Euclid, but that kind of author is not likely to be attractive at a supper-party, and certainly not likely to succeed in other branches of literary work. Yet it is odd that, without too much violence to language, we might describe Godwin as one of the most versatile authors of his time. Though a dealer in the most abstract speculations, he became an industrious Dryasdust, raking in the obscurest assortments of waste paper. In spite of his priggishness, he was a writer of popular books for children, and, without the smallest claims to poetic imagination, he was the author of one tragedy which escaped failure. A more remarkable fact, however, was his success as a novelist. He wrote in a comparatively barren period. The generation which had been impressed by the novels of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Goldsmith had passed away, and the novel of the nineteenth century had not yet come to life in Miss Austen and Scott. The novels

which were produced in the interval, and can still be read by any one except conscientious professors of English literature, may be counted on the fingers—perhaps of one hand. Godwin's *Caleb Williams* is one of the few. It can be read without the pressure of a sense of duty. It has lived —though in comparative obscurity—for over a century, and high authorities tell us that vitality prolonged for that period raises a presumption that a book deserves the title of classic. Three generations must have accepted it, and as each naturally condemns the taste of the old fogies, its predecessors, the agreement implies some permanent attractiveness. There has been time for a reaction and a re-reaction. Living novelists, if one may judge from their practice, will say that *Caleb Williams* offends against all manner of sound canons of criticism. I am a little sceptical as to all such canons, and rather infer that a book which can survive in spite of such incompatibility must have had some of the seeds of life. Few writers, I fear, can be confident that their works will interest their great-great-grandchildren ; and only such happy persons should be quite ready to throw the first stone.

Godwin's personal characteristics are sufficiently

revealed in his life published some years ago by Mr. Kegan Paul. The subject was not altogether an easy one to manage. Some people shine, as it were, by their own light. There are others, of whom Godwin was one, who become interesting only when the observer is prepared to look at him from the right point of view. Lowell, in speaking of the inimitable Pepys, calls him an 'unconscious humourist.' The diary, that is, has all the effect of humorous writing, but the writer did not intend to produce a smile, and made his quaint confessions as if they would be to his readers, as they were to him, just the most natural things in the world. The reader, however, has to supply a great deal more from his own resources in the case of Godwin. He reminds us of a familiar difficulty which besets writers of fiction. When they introduce a bore for the sake of the comic effect of his tediousness, the tediousness is very apt to tire the reader. Now Pepys had infinitely too much vivacity ever to have been a bore, but Godwin, as I have said, was a bore by nature. Everybody, I hold, is a bore to some people, but Godwin was one of the unlucky persons capable of boring all round. He can never be amusing taken by himself, and we have to make

the effort of seeing him among his fellow-actors before we catch any glimpse of the comedy in which he played a part. Lamb's famous description of the damning of Godwin's *Antonio* gives the true point of view. To Godwin himself the event, no doubt, was simply painful; the average spectator saw nothing in it but the proper punishment of stupidity; Lamb, by showing us the simple-minded philosopher in his oddly inappropriate position, manages to combine a smile with compassion. A writer possessed of Lamb's skill might manage to throw a similar light upon the whole career of the unlucky dramatist.

The social atmosphere of Godwin's early days was not exactly calculated—I hope that I may say so without offence—to stimulate any germs of humour or fancy. The son of a dissenting minister in a country village, he began by following in his father's steps. A revered tutor made him a Sandemanian. According to Godwin (I do not answer for the statement) Calvin had damned ninety-nine men out of every hundred; and Sandeman contrived a scheme for damning ninety-nine out of every hundred Calvinists. Remembering that the amiable Faraday was a member of the sect, I cannot doubt that the creed admits of

a milder interpretation. Anyhow, Godwin stuck to it for a time, and resisted the ensnaring arguments of Arians and Arminians. A glimpse of the social stratum which enjoyed such intellectual food may be given by a passage in a letter from his mother—a worthy and affectionate old lady in spite of her peculiar views of spelling, punctuation, and Christian charity. That her daughter may not be

> as the figtree whome the master of the vineyard came seeking fruit and found none. Is my daily prayer for her and all of you poor Jack once made a profession two but him I have no hopes off. I may say the same of Joseph how cutting it is to be the means of bringing children into the world to be the subjects of the Kingdom of Darkness to dwell with Divils and Damned Spirits from whence as I heard you mention in your prayers there is no redemption.

The 'prayers' must have been edifying, but William went the way, it is to be feared—wherever it may have led — of Jack, Joseph, and Hannah. His nonconformity took him, like Priestley and Price, into the ranks of political radicalism, and while his Calvinistic theory of predestination changed into the doctrine of 'philosophical necessity,' Rousseau became his guide in place of Jonathan Edwards. He left the pulpit, but only to preach lay sermons as an

author of all work. He became known in the circles which were prepared to welcome the French Revolution. He records in his diary the subjects of some of the talks which enlivened their tea-parties and other more convivial gatherings. Sandemanian tracts were out of place, but they talked of 'ancient virtue and respect for other men's judgments,' of self-love, sympathy, 'perfectibility,' and 'ideal unity.' Now and then they were honoured by the presence of the great Dr. Priestley, or of the shrewd, cynical Horne Tooke, the veteran survivor of the old Wilkite agitation; or of Thomas Hollis, who swore by the old-fashioned republicanism of Milton and Algernon Sidney. Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft represented the early stage of the crusade for the rights of women. His closest ally was Holcroft, ex-stable-boy at Newmarket, popular dramatist, and keen republican agitator. With Hollis and Holcroft, Godwin helped to revise Paine's *Rights of Man*. It had been suppressed by the fears of its first publishers, and its circulation was soon to become the most dangerous of ventures for the party booksellers. Meanwhile Godwin brought out his own *Political Justice*, and became the philosopher of the English Revolu-

tionists. No book, says Hazlitt, 'ever gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country. Tom Paine was considered for the time a Tom Fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. "Throw away your books of chemistry," said Wordsworth to a young man, "and read Godwin on Necessity."' Hazlitt probably exaggerates, but it is true that Wordsworth and Coleridge, then in their revolutionary fever, were strongly impressed. Coleridge addressed an enthusiastic sonnet to the author of the book (which, however, he had not read), and became a personal friend. Rival prophets, indeed, have their little jars, and Coleridge, after one interview, denounces, in his peculiar phrase, the 'grossness and vulgar insanocecity of this dim-headed prig of a philosophocide.' Humbler youths not only accepted Godwin as a teacher, but always declared that a study of his book had made an epoch in their lives, and permanently elevated their moral tone. The philosophy, it is true, was startling, but it was delivered in the most edifying tones. No 'milder-mannered' literary Lambro ever proposed to scuttle the ship of state. He discoursed as calmly as one of his old colleagues in the ministry, who would be condemned by the godly

as too much given to 'cold morality.' Quietly, as one propounding mere matter-of-fact or truths which, when once announced, must be self-evident, he shows the absurdity, not only of kings and aristocrats, but of government in general. Democracy is the least bad system, but it is at best a makeshift on the way to anarchy. We are to have no parliaments, no states, no laws. He sorrowfully admits that it may be right at the moment to resist a murderer by force, but punishment is essentially unreasonable. Force is not argument; it is as foolish to be indignant with a murderer as to be indignant with his knife; and reason is (or ought to be) omnipotent. We ought to convince the scoundrel of his mistake instead of sending him to prison. All restraints are bad, even when self-imposed. Promises in general are therefore bad, and marriage so obviously absurd that it can be demolished in a paragraph. Moreover, all the 'private affections' are bad, for they imply partiality and therefore injustice. Reason tells me to save the life of a virtuous Fénelon rather than the life of his valet. If the valet be my father or brother, that little accident can make no difference in the eye of pure reason. Gratitude is thus a vice, because it tends to gross partiality.

Nobody, I suppose, ever made so clean a sweep of all existing social ties, but he always preserves the calm and benevolent tone of a preacher drawing obvious morals from the Sermon on the Mount, though the Christian creed is among the doctrines too absurd to require explicit confutation.

The book thus crammed with intellectual explosives appeared in 1793, when the respectable classes were in the panic caused by the French Revolution and the Government preparing the severest measures of suppression. Godwin's friends, Horne Tooke and Holcroft, were about to be tried for high treason; and Godwin expected that he might himself be the next victim. It is only just to say that he appears to have rather courted martyrdom by openly showing his sympathies. The acquittal of his friends put an end to the danger; and his own circle rather regretted, it would seem, that he had not had a chance of sharing their glory. Pitt, they reported by way of apology, had said in the Cabinet that a three-guinea book could not do much harm in the class which was dangerous precisely for want of guineas. The fact that so dear a book should have had an immediate circulation of over four

thousand copies is indeed a remarkable proof of the general excitement. A surprising number of the well-to-do must have been anxious to know what a Jacobin had to say for himself. Pitt, however, may have had other reasons. The Attorney-General could have no difficulty in quoting passages from Paine's *Rights of Man*, and inserting 'innuendoes' to show that they applied to our gracious sovereign. Godwin kept so much to the supernal regions of abstract argument that it was comparatively difficult to saddle his book with any definite or immediate political application. Moreover—in perfect consistency with his general doctrine—he had fully and explicitly denounced violent revolution. Force, he argues, is as bad on one side as on the other. Reason is so omnipotent that we may trust to its efficiency without any extraneous support. He condemned organised agitation even in support of his own principles. His friends were accused of belonging to seditious clubs; he held that all clubs implied some abnegation of individual liberty. Pitt might be right in holding that reason thus understood was a force of very little significance. True, Godwin's theories logically applied might tend to dissolve the very ties of all social and political

order. That did not much matter till his readers became capable of drawing inferences, or till his doctrines were translated into terms immediately applicable to George III. and rotten boroughs.

Godwin, in any case, might well pass for a great philosopher. He dealt in what is called 'inexorable logic.' That is to say, that whenever he ran his head against a lamp-post, he calmly asserted that it did not exist. If the proper way of making a science of politics be to ignore all appeals to experience, his method was irreproachable. That happened to be precisely the opinion of a good many people at the time, and Godwin's Utopia, though liable to collapse at the first touch of common-sense, appeared to enthusiasts to be solid because self-consistent. Moreover, if we consider the merits of the exposition, apart from the validity of the theory expounded, it showed remarkable literary power. The style is simple and solid; the argument is well arranged; and, in short, the logical architecture leaves nothing to be desired if we will allow the architect to use for his material what is really mere moonshine. Nor can it be denied that he is appealing to the sense of justice and humanity of his readers; and that, if he is not impassioned,

there is a general glow of benevolent sentiment which commended him to the more generous impulses of the revolutionary period. I have only to say, however, that it is easy to understand that Godwin would act the part of philosopher to perfection. Ingenuous youths of both sexes are for a time capable of reverence for that variety of the species. The illusion indeed frequently lasts with the superior sex beyond the period of early enthusiasm. Colleges devoted to female education are, I fear, rapidly destroying that agreeable distinction. With minds sharpened by study, young ladies will soon make their brothers' discovery that when a man claims to be a philosopher there is a strong presumption that he must be an impostor. In Godwin's days, Newnham and Girton were not even conceivable; and a philosopher might hope to be taken seriously by a circle of feminine admirers. They could revere a man, not though but, because he was a bore. Incapacity for lighter talk proved that his thoughts were absorbed in serious topics, and the absence of romance showed that in him the emotions were under the sway of reason. Godwin had begun by showing superiority to the impulses of a young man's fancy. He had resolved to marry in a

business-like spirit, and to save trouble asked his sister to choose a wife for him. She found a young lady good-natured and humble, and 'with about as much religion as my William likes.' Godwin took the matter into consideration, but deliberated so long and calmly that he never made the necessary advances. His fame as a philosopher soon rendered any advances on his side unnecessary. He became attractive to a whole circle of feminine enthusiasts. Among his female admirers was Miss Alderson (afterwards Mrs. Opie), a beauty, a bit of a poetess, and then an ardent radical. There was Mrs. Inchbald, of the *Simple Story*, a bright and very clever and saucy actress, who was able, we are told, at any social meeting to charm to her side the admirers who surrounded any rival beauty. Though, as a devout Catholic, she must have had more religion than William liked, she was attracted by the serene philosopher, and carried on what seems to have been a lively flirtation. There was the beautiful 'Perdita,' Mary Robinson, who, in spite of her questionable position and her aristocratic connections, was willing to reciprocate the attentions of the humble author. There was Mrs. Reveley, afterwards Shelley's Mrs. Gisborne. She

was very young and very beautiful, says his daughter, and full of 'deep sensibility'; her heart was full 'to bursting' with the hopes of political freedom, and she 'drank deeply' of Godwin's philosophy. His heart, it is added, was not disturbed—for the present at least—but both Mrs. Reveley and Mrs. Inchbald burst into tears when they heard that their philosopher was married to Mary Wollstonecraft. His relations even to that model enthusiast were a little hampered by philosophy. He took the peculiar precaution of occupying a separate house in order that their affection might not be exposed to the trial of constant intimacy. She complains, too, that when he was absent on a journey, he was too much attracted by the 'homage of vulgar minds' and restored to his 'icy philosophy.' The connection did not last long enough to try whether more serious jars might not arise between an icy philosopher and a romantic sentimentalist. Yet it is only fair to admit that Godwin seems to have been roused for once to a genuine passion, and that when his wife died, he felt the blow like a man and dropped the philosopher. There was, one is glad to know, some really warm blood beneath the surface, though during the rest of his career it remained

quiescent. His domestic circumstances, however, made it natural enough that he should soon think of marrying again; and then the philosopher reappears in all his force. He applied to Miss Lee of the 'Canterbury Tales' used in Byron's *Werner*. She hesitated on account of his free-thinking. He retorted by applying the omnipotent force of reason. If you ought to argue even with a burglar, you clearly should be able to persuade the object of your affections. Accordingly he explained clearly that his theory of ethics was quite consistent with her theological orthodoxy; he pointed out that her creed was 'the quintessence of bigotry,' and that in refuting him she was acting in the spirit of the eleventh and twelfth century. The argument may have been perfectly sound, but seems to require some further steps before justifying the inference that she ought to marry him. She did not draw it. Next year he heard of the death of Mrs. Reveley's husband, and now applied a closer bit of logic. She, he declares, had admitted that she loved him, even when she had a husband and he a wife. As these obstacles were removed, the obvious inference followed that she should become the sole 'happiness of one of the most known men of the age,

of one whose principles, whose temper, whose thoughts you have long been acquainted with, and will, I believe, confess their universal constancy.' Nothing could be more obvious. Moreover, the match would 'restore her self-respect, and ensure for her no mean degree of respectability.' Mrs. Reveley in despair took to the most irritating of all positions. She was incapable, she said, of reasoning with him. He pointed out in vain that he was incapable of using an atom of sophistry. If, therefore, she could not reason for herself, she clearly ought to accept arguments so satisfactorily vouched. But against a person who declines to reason, reason is powerless, and Mrs. Reveley married Mr. Gisborne. Godwin was next to illustrate the failure of reason to protect even its possessors. Mrs. Clairmont, his next-door neighbour, saw him sitting in his balcony and exclaimed, 'Is it possible that I behold the immortal Godwin?' The poor man yielded to 'the homage of a vulgar mind,' and became a slave for life. No man's wife was ever more unanimously condemned by his friends. Lamb could only call her 'that damned Mrs. Godwin' or the 'disgusting woman who wears green spectacles.' She was handsome, we are told, and

clever enough to enforce her authority. Possibly Godwin's admirers were a little too anxious to make her the scapegoat for his infirmities. His later career suggests a painful tract upon the moral dangers of impecuniosity. Attempts to set up in business; bankruptcy steadily advancing; and application for help from old friends and even compassionate adversaries; ending in the final appointment of the old radical to be 'yeoman usher of the Exchequer,' make up a melancholy story.

In spite of his weakness, Godwin had some real claims upon his young friends outside his philosophy. He says of himself, in a curious bit of self-analysis, that he was always anxious to appreciate and encourage merit, but was hampered by his nervous diffidence. He lost his self-possession in company, and, like many shy men, blundered into excessive frankness. His bluntness led him into quarrels, though his obvious good intentions led to reconciliation. A pupil of early days noted on paper some of the 'pointed and humiliating words' bestowed by his tutor. He had been called 'a foolish wretch,' a brute and a viper to his face, and behind his back a 'tiger' and a 'black heart' with 'no proper feelings.' Godwin,

upon finding the notes, was gratified by the pupil's 'sensibility,' and pointed out that the reproaches were only masked expressions of the kindness which he had showed by real sacrifices for the young gentleman's benefit. He gave really good advice to a whole series of young men attracted by his fame, and, when they were at a distance, was not tempted to spice it with cutting epithets. Shelley was only one, though the only memorable instance. He had fancied, as boys naturally do, that so great a man must have lived a long time ago. Godwin belonged to the sphere of Plato and Bacon, and must naturally have been a contemporary of one of those immortals or rather outside of time in general. On discovering that the world was still blessed with so great a luminary, Shelley offered his homage with characteristic enthusiasm. Nothing could be better than the advice which Godwin bestowed on the enthusiastic proselyte. He points out to the fervid disciple that the wrongs of Ireland were not likely to be cured by a pamphlet and a speech; that twenty years was a short period in the life of a nation; and that even the Catholic superstition had done some good in its time. If Godwin's philosophy prompted Shelley to turn to poetry in place of politics, we should

certainly be grateful; though we may regret that so much of the mentor's philosophy penetrated into the poetry. Unluckily Godwin held another doctrine, which has its charms for philosophers. A rich man is surely bound by reason to subsidise great thinkers. Godwin had already, it seems, been demoralised by the excellent Thomas Wedgwood, who had liberally applied that dangerous principle to Coleridge and other men of high promise. So-called 'loans' became gifts, and by Shelley's time, it would seem, the gifts scarcely deserved gratitude, for they were the bare discharge of a plain obligation. The culminating point was reached when Godwin—the denouncer of marriage—refused to see the Shelleys for acting upon his principles, and declined to accept money from the seducer of his daughter—unless the cheque were made payable in a different name. We can only exclaim with Mrs. Shelley, 'Oh, philosophy!' Shelley behaved to the old gentleman with admirable courtesy and firmness, but seems never to have lost his illusions. The thumb-screw was being applied when Godwin published his novel *Mandeville* in 1817. Shelley declares that its

interest is of that irresistible and overwhelming kind that the

mind in its influence is like a cloud borne on by an impetuous wind. . . . In style and strength of expression *Mandeville* is wonderfully great and the energy and sweetness of the sentiment scarcely to be equalled. Clifford's character as mere beauty is a divine and soothing contrast, and I do not think, if perhaps I except (and I know not if I ought to do so) the speech of Agathon in the *Symposium* of Plato, that there ever was produced a moral discourse more characteristic of all that is admirable and lovely in human nature; more lovely and admirable in itself, than that of Henrietta to Mandeville as he is recovering from madness.

The touch about Plato is delightful, and reminds one of some modern criticisms. Poets can be the best of all critics, but they are a little apt to fancy that singular power in the author instead of singular impulsiveness on their own side is the explanation of the 'impetuous wind' of enthusiasm.

That Shelley, for the moment at least, should put Godwin beside Plato, not only as a thinker but as a literary artist, is a little startling, even if the compliment were intended to soften the refusal to be bled in pocket. Posterity has long ceased to hanker after *Mandeville*. I, at least, have tried in vain to discover the slightest justification for Shelley's enthusiasm. Can we discover any grounds for such enthusiasm in Godwin's masterpiece? *Caleb Williams* was published when

Godwin's fame was at its zenith—just before the trial of his friends. A preface, announcing its purpose, was suppressed for the time by the fears of his publisher. 'It is now known to philosophers,' says this document (philosophers had just been enlightened by *Political Justice*) 'that the spirit and character of government intrudes into every rank of life.' The novel was to illustrate this truth, and to exhibit 'the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man.' That is to say, apparently, it is to show how the wicked aristocrat carries into private life the execrable principles of kings and ministers. *Caleb Williams* was, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to rouse men to a sense of the evils of slavery. The reader, unassisted by the preface, would scarcely perceive this doctrine between the lines. Falkland, the hero, is a model country gentleman; not only a benevolent and public-spirited landlord, but a man of taste and a poet. Like his predecessor, Sir Charles Grandison, he shows his high qualities under the most delicate circumstances. A lovely Italian lady is so charmed by him as to excite the jealousy of the lover to whom she is already betrothed. Falkland's tact and dignity enable him

to avoid a duel, to reconcile the estranged couple, and to make it perfectly clear that his moderation is due, not to want of courage, but to the loftiest magnanimity. Returning to England, he settles on his property, to become the cynosure of the surrounding society, much to the disgust of the brutal Squire Tyrrel, who had previously had things all his own way. Tyrrel bullies his tenants, especially certain Hawkinses, and Falkland takes them under his protection. Tyrrel then tries to force a poor girl who is dependent upon him into a marriage with a lout, and though Falkland again endeavours to intervene, she dies in consequence of Tyrrel's machinations. Falkland, righteously indignant, denounces Tyrrel at a public assembly, and the ruffian is abashed by the power of reason. As soon as he has got out of hearing, however, he recovers himself, and returns to deliver a knock-down blow, a kind of argument which he had learnt from the heroes of the prize-ring. Falkland, who is slight, though inimitably graceful, retires to consider the position. A duel would be the obvious result, unless indeed Tyrrel had forfeited the right to meet a gentleman. Had Falkland been a Godwinite, he would not have adopted that barbarous custom; but perhaps

Godwin's peculiar morality might justify the course which he actually took. On the principle illustrated by Fénelon's valet, it was clearly desirable that Tyrrel should be killed rather than Falkland, while a duel would equalise the chance. It seems, however, that Falkland forgot to reason. He meets Tyrrel and stabs him to the heart. Suspicion is roused, and Falkland comes before the magistrates. He declares himself innocent, and tells them that he valued Tyrrel's life even more than his own. His enemy's death had made it impossible to wipe off the stain on his honour. He cannot even commit suicide—which might have seemed desirable—because suicide might look like a confession of the murder. Falkland is dismissed without a stain upon his character, and suspicion falls upon the Hawkinses, father and son, the very victims whom Falkland had protected against Tyrrel. He now allows them to be hanged, and sanctions or starts a report that they have confessed their guilt. In spite of this satisfactory solution, Falkland cannot be happy. He is tortured by remorse, or rather by the fear of being found out. He is, however, as benevolent as ever, and, unluckily for him, shows his goodness by taking Caleb Williams for

a secretary. Now Williams is curiosity embodied. He is sharp enough to connect his patron's gloom with the story of the murder, and manages to experiment upon Falkland much as Hamlet experimented upon his uncle. He discovers that Falkland is accustomed to retire in fits of overpowering gloom to a closet, where there is an iron chest, which presumably contains a key to the secret. Falkland presently discovers him in the act of breaking open the chest. The question naturally occurs, what did the chest contain? If Williams had consulted Sherlock Holmes he might, perhaps, have discovered some clue, but to the ordinary mind no connection is conceivable. The chest, however, struck the popular imagination and gave the title to a dramatised version of the novel. Falkland, anyhow, is startled to energetic action. He confesses the murder to Williams, and adds that, though he admits himself to be 'the blackest of villains,' he is determined to leave behind him a spotless name. He loves his reputation more than the whole world and all its inhabitants. He will not silence Williams by killing him, reflecting that he 'may not be so fortunate in his next murder.' He will keep his detector in bondage, and on the least threat of

divulging the secret, Williams shall suffer torments of which he has not the faintest idea. When the wretched secretary tries to escape, Falkland makes use of the chest incident, declares that Williams has stolen the contents, and arranges a conclusive proof by secreting them in the room of the supposed thief. Williams is now at Falkland's mercy; he is imprisoned; escapes to live with robbers, and afterwards rambles into London slums and the remotest corners of Wales. Everywhere he is watched by Falkland's spies. He always manages to stumble into places—Godwin has no scruples as to incredible coincidences—where Falkland is revered by some old dependent, and where the discovery that Williams has been faithless to so perfect a master causes him to be expelled with execration. Driven to despair, he at last openly accuses Falkland, who comes to meet the charge worn to a skeleton. Williams has no evidence to produce, but the force of reason triumphs. On hearing his impressive speech, Falkland throws himself into his accuser's arms and confesses the charge. 'Williams,' he says, 'you have conquered. I see too late the greatness and elevation of your mind.' He dies in three days from the agony. Meanwhile,

strangely enough, Williams's veneration for his oppressor has never declined. He declares that he is 'an atrocious and execrable wretch for ever inflicting upon Falkland an agony a thousand times worse than death.'

The book closes with this cheerful reflection, and suggests the question, what has become of the moral? How about the wickedness of government? The answer must be that it has passed out of sight. Something, indeed, is made of the social abuses of the time: there is a prison of the old pattern, and an innocent man who dies in it because he is too poor to pay for legal assistance; and an impossible band of robbers—imported apparently from the region described by Schiller—whose captain argues philosophically as to the rights of property with Williams. But such matters only supply accessories. Falkland, the centre of interest, is not the typical oppressor of the poor; and, whenever he is not murdering or concealing a murder, uses his influence for the best possible purposes. His mind has been poisoned, we are told, by the 'idle and groundless romances of chivalry.' He suffers from Don Quixote's complaint, but has managed to mislearn his lesson. The Don would certainly have felt

bound to fight instead of meanly assassinating. Falkland is a perverse monomaniac, who will guard his reputation even by deserving infamy. That, no doubt, might suggest a very interesting motive. The psychology of hypocrisy—of the transition by which the sense of honour is replaced by a desire for being honoured—might be embodied in a lifelike hero, as it is common enough in real life. With Godwin, Falkland becomes a heap of contradictory qualities. Monomaniacs are rather in favour now, and a modern novelist would, perhaps, make Falkland into an illustration of heredity or the general corruption of society. But he is so obviously unreal, and all the incidents so frankly impossible, that we scarcely feel even the interest excited by a caricature of conceivable wickedness. Why, then, are we interested? In the first place, because mysterious crimes are always interesting. The interest may be wrong, but it is natural. But, in the next place, given the situation and shutting our eyes to impossibilities, Godwin shows the kind of power manifested by the *Political Justice*. The story is developed with admirable order and lucidity—if the machinery will not bear inspection, we need not inspect—and the agony is slowly and steadily

piled up till the catastrophe in which the victim suddenly changes places with the oppressor. The sentiment is nearly that of Browning's *Instans Tyrannus*. Browning's tyrant 'sets his wits on the stretch to inveigle the wretch,' till, when he has 'laid his last plan to extinguish the man,' the man suddenly starts to his feet and prays, to the tyrant's confusion. Godwin's hero does not pray —it would be against his principles—he invokes the force of reason; but the result is the same, and the gradual working up of the catastrophe, the slow and steady evolution of the diabolical agency, has a fascinating power. We catch something of the writer's own profound interest in the story, and admire at least the persistence and ingenuity (perverse as its means) with which variations are performed upon the theme which is always in view. Godwin, of course, had not a trace of the peculiar skill exemplified in *Pride and Prejudice*, where every incident is both perfectly natural and conducive to the effect. Yet his incidents are so well combined that the book has the same sort of unity and co-ordination, and even the formality of the style is congenial to his own ideals. Godwin, in his *Enquirer*, gives a curious discourse upon that subject. English style, he

declares, has reached its perfection; it is no longer cumbrous, as with Hooker, nor over simple, as with Addison. Dignity and clearness are now judiciously combined. Smollett is condemned for 'lowering his style,' and making one of his characters talk like a real servant-maid. Now, it is the office of a poet or novelist, says Godwin, 'to adorn the style of their characters, and to give to real life the most impressive form,' that is, to make everybody talk like a book. Godwin, in short, as became a man of his epoch, is nervous about the 'dignity of history'—whether the history be real or fictitious—and failed to anticipate the secret revealed by Scott. He will not condescend to the vivid touch which suggests direct vision and gives individuality of scenery and customs. His speakers declaim in balanced phrases even when they try to be in a passion. They are, in fact, generalised types instead of individuals. To judge him fairly, we must accept his position. His novels are a kind of mean between the moral tale of the Rasselas or Candide variety, where actors and incidents are arbitrary pegs upon which to hang wise and witty reflections, and the novel which frankly deals with real life and makes use of the most familiar touches.

Godwin is still a publicist of his time, given to reflections upon 'nature' and 'the dignity of man,' and the abstract truths or platitudes which were then popular in political discussions. He condescends to become a novelist in the interests of his doctrine, but cannot stoop so far as quite to throw aside his stilts. His actors are not quite men nor quite abstract qualities, but human beings seen as in a darkened mirror, or at such a distance that the individual peculiarities are blurred into indistinctness. Making the necessary omissions, however, and admitting his style to be appropriate to his end, we can accept his good, solid, straightforward utterance as effective enough in its kind.

Caleb Williams might be compared with Mrs. Clive's very striking Paul Ferroll. Ferroll combines the murderer and the polished gentleman far more intelligibly than Falkland, and refuses to let an innocent person suffer in his place. Godwin's book has, however, a certain advantage from the fervour due to his intended moral. The moral, it is true, eludes him. It reminds one of Lowell's description of an orator who tries in vain to get his subject properly laid down. He makes desperate attempts, wanders off in many direc-

tions, and in his last contortion 'sees his subjick a-nosin' round arter him agin'.' Still, the pursuit of a subject gives a certain unction to oratory, and in the same kind of perverted and anomalous fashion Godwin's moral gives a sort of momentum and diffused energy to his mass of incongruities.

Godwin's next novel, *St. Leon*, is, I suppose, the last—in spite of Shelley—which anybody has read in modern times, and marks a stage in his development. It appeared in 1799, and shows that he had learnt something from his brief married life. He announces in the preface that he has now learnt that there is really some good in the 'private affections.' He adds calmly that this opinion is perfectly consistent with the rest of his doctrines —though to most readers the alteration required in them seems to be considerable. Anyhow, his new doctrine again provided him with a really striking situation. St. Leon is a French nobleman of the seventeenth century, though, it need hardly be said, Godwin takes very little trouble to give any genuine picture of the time. St. Leon has made a happy and aristocratic marriage, when he is accidentally reduced to extreme poverty. An affectionate family, however, surrounds him, and he manages to get on pretty well in an Alpine

district where the people are not corrupted by luxury. To him enters an old gentleman who has discovered the philosopher's stone. This, as is known, enables a man to produce boundless wealth and also gives the power of restoring youth. The possessor, however, has been made so miserable that he is only anxious to die, and death, it seems, can only be secured by transferring the stone to another man, who must accept the same terms and be pledged to absolute secrecy. The purpose is to show how miserable a man would become when his exemption from mortality made him incapable of sympathy with his ephemeral companions. That is the kind of text which might have been treated effectively in the old moral tale of the Candide variety. Godwin not only expands it into a long quasi-historical novel, with all manner of impossible adventures and coincidences, but contrives to miss the moral. The point of the situation in his version comes to be the difficulty which St. Leon finds in accounting for his sudden accession to boundless wealth. He has a perfect wife, supposed to be meant for a portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft, but the poor lady is tormented by a curiosity as keen as that of Caleb Williams. In those days, no doubt, it would be more difficult

than it is now to account for a mysterious bound into wealth; the Stock Exchange was not invented. Still, one would have thought that it was not beyond human ingenuity to get round such a perplexity. St. Leon is unequal to the task. He comes under suspicion—pretty well justified indeed—of dealing in magic; he alienates his family by his unaccountable proceedings; he is locked up in a dungeon by a nobleman who guesses at his powers, and proposes to keep him employed in making gold; he falls into the hands of the Inquisition; and though he manages to escape and to disguise himself by again becoming a youth, he has in that capacity to repudiate his children; becomes thoroughly miserable and is left at the end of the story proposing to die in spite of his miraculous gifts. Godwin had got further from realities than he was in *Caleb Williams*, and makes his characters indulge in a stilted declamation which he appears to have meant for passion. A brief passage will be enough to show what was the kind of eloquence which induced contemporaries—even Shelley—to think that he was at home in describing 'whirlwinds of passion.' St. Leon's wife has guessed the secret. She feels that a hopeless gulf has opened between herself and her

husband. Her beloved son has been forced to drop his disreputable father and she herself is dying under the shock. A page or two of eloquence ends with the remarks—

> How unhappy the wretch, the monster rather let me say, who is without an equal, who looks through the world and in the world cannot find a brother, who is endowed with attributes which no living being participates with him, who is therefore cut off for ever from all cordiality and confidence, can never unbend himself, but lives a solitary joyless inhabitant of a prison, the materials of which are emeralds and rubies. How unhappy this wretch, how weak and ignoble the man who voluntarily accepts this odious existence.

The lady's passion has clearly not impeded her command of grammar.

The modern novelist does not accept this method of giving 'the most impressive form' to 'real life.' In truth it is only tolerable so long as there is some real force behind the queer old-fashioned mannerism. Godwin, by the time of *St. Leon*, was forcing his vein under pressure of embarrassment, and the usual result followed. In *Caleb Williams* it was by a kind of good luck that his philosophy provided him with an effective situation, and though it did not in the least prove his moral, and though characters and incidents are simply preposterous, gave a certain power to his

elbow. The current of general conviction which had worked the *Political Justice* had force enough to turn the mill, if one may say so, even when the purpose was incongruous and the effect produced very different from the intention. *Caleb Williams* is a kind of literary curiosity—a monstrous hybrid between different species—which gains its interest by a fortunate confusion. But if any one should be prompted to push his study into other novels, I fear that he is destined to disappointment.

# WALTER BAGEHOT

I HAVE sometimes wondered whether Bagehot has yet received his due fame. His patent of literary rank needs, indeed, no critic's countersign. His intimate friends, R. H. Hutton and Sir R. Giffen, have given admirable appreciations of his intellect and character. Sir M. E. Grant Duff's address in a recent number of this *Review*[1] shows how deeply he impressed a most competent eye-witness. There is a curious testimony to his interest for more distant readers. Some years ago the 'Travelers' Insurance Company' of Hartford, Connecticut, set a precedent in advertising which authors might desire to see imitated in England. It published a complete edition of Bagehot's works, with its own name printed in the headlines throughout the volumes. It employed, too, a most competent editor. Mr. Forrest Morgan laboured upon Bagehot's text with a zeal unsurpassable by any editor of a classic. Bagehot was

[1] *National Review* for December 1899.

either incapable of correcting proofs or calmly indifferent to errors: his pages bristle with misprints and grammatical solecisms; he mangled quotations so strangely that it is difficult to explain how he contrived to do it, and, as he rarely gave references, the task of identifying and correcting was very laborious. Mr. Morgan's zeal was equal to the difficulty, and a British author again owes to an American the first performance of a valuable service. No one can read the collected works without recognising the singular versatility and vivacity of Bagehot's intellect. It is remarkable, says Bagehot, that Ricardo had already made a fortune and transformed the science of economics when he died at the age of fifty-one. Either performance might have been a sufficient life occupation. Bagehot died at precisely the same age, having been a successful man of business, an energetic journalist, and the author of treatises which made a mark upon political, economical, and sociological speculation. Whatever the value of Bagehot's theories, his literary faculty was, of course, incomparably superior to Ricardo's. His books confirm what his friends tell us of his conversation. His mind was so alert, his interest in life so keen, and his powers

of illustration so happy, that he could give freshness even to talk upon the British Constitution and liveliness to a discussion of the Bank reserve. He could not, that is, be dull or commonplace even on the driest or tritest of topics.

If, as I fancy, Bagehot scarcely received so ready a welcome as he deserved, one cause is obvious. Authors, if I may adopt a formula which he employed rather too often, may be divided into two classes, the sentimentalists and the cynics. There can be no doubt which is the most popular. Everybody likes 'geniality' in print as in talk; and, of course, everybody is quite right in the main. Yet the genial author has the benefit of a packed jury. Each reader perhaps takes to himself the compliment paid to his species: what good fellows we all are! And then we are all pleased with every accession to the tacit conspiracy for keeping up comfortable illusions. The poor cynic can hardly get a fair hearing. It is surely desirable that somebody should look facts in the face, instead of taking credit for the equivocal virtue called 'seeing the bright side of things.' Things in general have a very dark side; and though the man who dwells upon it gets an unpleasant name, he may be doing us an important service. We

always need good assailants of humbug. 'Cynic,' indeed, has a very variable connotation, and it would be altogether wrong to apply the epithet to Bagehot without qualification. In Hutton's life of his friend the word inevitably comes up, but with the explanation that it refers to a youthful failing, more or less outlived. Bagehot, he admits, always scorned a fool, and in early days the scorn was not yet tempered by the compassion which is the growth of later years—when we have come to know how many and what excellent people belong to the class. Bagehot's satirical 'hear, hear,' he tells us, took the heart out of young orators at debating societies and reduced the over-eloquent man to his 'lowest terms.' His 'cynicism' meant anything but indifference. It was combined with exuberantly high spirits and intense enjoyment of intellectual combats. University College, in Gower Street, was then, if Hutton is right, a far more 'awakening' place than most Oxford colleges. Bagehot, like all clever lads, owed less to lecturers than to his contemporaries: to the impact, as he says, of thought upon thought, to 'mirth and refutation, ridicule and laughter,' which are the 'free play of the natural mind.' The young men discussed every topic from the

Corn Laws to the question whether 'A is A' can be properly called a 'law of thought.' Oxford, on the contrary, according to Bagehot, was recommended by authorities as a place where 'the appetite for knowledge was repressed,' a sleepy hollow in which the Thirty-nine Articles were taken to represent ultimate logical categories. An orthodox University, of course, looked stupid enough in Gower Street, the natural home of heterodoxy. Oxford men were deeply agitated by what they innocently took to be thought, but to Bagehot, in spite of certain faint proclivities towards Catholicism, their speculations appeared to be futile danglings after extinct phantasms. Oxford, indeed, provided him with one most congenial friend in Arthur Clough. But Clough represented the revolt against the Oxford of Newman developing into a mellow, all-round cynicism. The true cynic should perceive that neither side has a monopoly of humbug. Bagehot's views of many things might be expressed, as Hutton remarks, in Clough's lines—

> Old things need not be therefore true,
> O brother man; nor yet the new—

which some people, with Emerson, translate as really meaning that 'Nothing is either true or

new.' Clough, says his friend, was led to a certain discouragement — a disenchantment; a 'fatigued way of looking at great subjects'— partly, as Bagehot thought, because he had been prematurely forced by Arnold's training into 'moral earnestness.' In fact, he had learnt that Arnold's disciples could be prigs. From that fate Bagehot was preserved by his vivid interest in life. If humbugs abounded all round, he did not become indifferent and fastidious, but only found an ampler field for his combative propensities. How little he was tainted by priggishness or 'moral earnestness' appears from the curious set of letters from Paris upon the *coup d'état* in 1851. Bagehot there came out as a thorough cynic, and his private letters, Hutton tells us, were even more cynical than those published in the *Inquirer*. The readers of that paper—good sound believers in the *Times* and the British Constitution—were naturally scandalised by the audacious young gentleman who argued that it was quite right to gag the Press and to ship off Leaders of the Opposition to Cayenne. Most young Liberals had been roused to enthusiasm by the revolutionary movements of 1848. Bagehot could only see the absurdities and the failures. He super-

intended the construction of the barricades at Paris to amuse himself; but he was revolted by the 'sallow, sincere, sour' fanatics behind them: the real Montagnards, who would rather shoot him than not. It is not possible, he observes, 'to respect any one who believes in human brotherhood.' That faith is too obviously nonsensical. 'M. Buonaparte is entitled to very great praise. He has very good heels to his boots, and the French just want treading down and nothing else —calm, cruel, business-like oppression to take the dogmatic conceit out of their heads.' J. S. Mill had praised the French spirit of generalisation. That spirit had come to this, that every Parisian wanted his head tapped in order to get the formulæ and nonsense out of it. Bagehot thoroughly accepted the view of the shopkeepers, that revolutions were bad for trade, and that Louis Napoleon, who put them down, was a genuine 'Saviour of Society.' A really eloquent passage upon the power of the Catholic Church suggests the more serious side of his doctrine. You may, he tells the Freethinker, disprove the creeds as much as you please; but in the end you find that the 'poorest priest in the remote region of the Basses Alpes has more power over men's souls

than human cultivation. His ill-mouthed masses move women's souls; can you? Ye scoff at Jupiter, yet he at least was believed in; you never have been. Idol for idol, the *de*throned is better than the *un*throned.' Superstition, that is, may be ridiculous to the reasoner; but to the politician it is a vast and living force to be reckoned with, and therefore to be respected. Bagehot's early leaning to Catholicism meant that he was susceptible to the historical prestige and imaginative fascinations of the Catholic Church. But then he was too thorough a Rationalist to accept Newman's recipe for suppressing doubt—that is, putting it down by an 'act of will.' In point of logic, the creed was false, though in practice, the Church might be not the less useful in its proper place. Though humbug, as Hosea Biglow remarked, has a 'solid value,' he won't believe it for himself. Some humbug, moreover, is purely mischievous. Both in religion and in politics dogmatism pretends to make absolute truths out of any principles that will lead to the desired conclusion. The Revolutionists illustrated the political evil; for in politics all absolute principles are necessarily absurd. Politics, as Burke had first shown, are 'made of time and place';

they are 'a piece of business . . . to be determined by sense and circumstance.' The one question is whether institutions will work ; not whether they can be ostensibly deduced from some arbitrary bit of abstract logic.

Bagehot's youthful audacity applied this to defend the indefensible. He was, as Hutton says, 'exasperating.' He sang the praises of an 'unprincipled adventurer,' and made light of perjury and violence. His cynicism was paraded with excessive levity, and good people's scruples needlessly flouted. Yet, assuming that Louis Napoleon deserved everything that even Victor Hugo could say of him, the letters show the real value of good, sweeping, outrageous cynicism. They raise the question which, sooner or later, has to be answered. The viler the despot the more important it is to inquire, What is the secret of his despotic power? It is all very well for popular orators to answer, 'Alliance with the devil.' A more philosophic observer will remark that a state of things in which the devil has such power must be radically wrong. In proclaiming the wickedness of the successful you are proving the imbecility of the virtuous. Your own principles may be irrefragable. Then why are they impracticable?

The lofty idealist refuses to consider such questions. The error, he assumes, cannot be in his theories, wherever else it may be. The function of the cynic is to force him to descend from the clouds and explain instead of simply denouncing. Bagehot, that is, was really putting a grave difficulty. He was only giving the most paradoxical turn to the convictions which found fuller expression in his later writings. The weaknesses of French politicians which he described with such singular vigour have certainly not wanted illustration from later experience. Nobody could describe more clearly some causes of the instability of the political order in France. Politics mean business, and therefore compromise. When every man is so logical that compromise becomes a deadly sin, how can the antagonists be held together except by a despotism which at least offers material prosperity? Bagehot's special way of putting it is characteristic. Theory in the lump is bad. The most essential quality for a free people, he declares, 'is much stupidity.' He points his moral by describing the pleasure with which, after a surfeit of brilliant French journalism, he came across an article in the *Morning Herald*. There was no 'sharp theory' in it, 'no

pointed expression, no fatiguing brilliancy,' only 'a dull, creeping, satisfactory sensation that there was nothing to admire.' There was some good in the *coup d'état*, which at least suppressed the useless, endless, empty logic-chopping of smart Parisian theorisers.

Bagehot is seeking point at the expense of accuracy, and will not take the sting out of his paradoxes. His wiser readers may supply the qualifications for themselves. If the less wise are shocked, he will only smile in his sleeve. He had far too much intellect to accept the thoroughly cynical conclusions that since we can know nothing we may believe anything, and since philosophy is delusive give up the attempt to theorise at all. On the contrary, his weakness is a rather excessive tendency to theorise. It appears in the literary criticisms, at which I can here only glance as illustrations of his habitual mental attitude. They have, above all things, the essential merits of freshness and sincerity. If he has not the special knowledge, he is absolutely free from the pedantry, of the literary expert. He has none of the cant of criticism, and never bores us with 'romantic and classical' or 'objective and subjective.' When he wants a general theory—as he

always does—he strikes one out in the heat of the moment. He has almost a trick—as I have hinted—of dividing all writers into two classes: philosophers are either 'seers' or 'gropers'; novelists are 'miscellaneous' or 'sentimental'; genius is symmetrical or irregular, and so forth. Such classifications will not always bear reflection: they only give emphasis to a particular aspect; but they show how his mind is always swarming with theories, and how he looks upon literature as a man primarily interested in the wider problems of the life and character which literature reflects. Critics, of course, might find fault with many of his dicta. He is sometimes commonplace because he tells us how things strike him, and not the less that they have struck every competent writer in much the same way. He writes of Shakespeare and Milton as if he had discovered them for the first time; he can at times utter a crude judgment, because he is too indifferent—if that be possible—to orthodox literary authority, and his literary criticism diverges into psychological or political speculations which are hardly relevant. That means that he is really most interested in the man behind the books. It is characteristic that he attacks the common statement about

Shakespeare which declares the man to be unknowable. Matthew Arnold's phrase, 'Others abide our question, thou art free!' is used, rightly or wrongly, to justify a theory which Bagehot holds—and I confess that I agree with him—to involve a complete fallacy. It is this interest in character, the comparative indifference to the technical qualities of books, which he values as bringing us into relations with living human beings, that gives a special quality to Bagehot's work. It implies no want of enthusiasm. Bagehot admires some men who had a personal interest for him, Clough and Hartley Coleridge, even more warmly than most authorities would sanction. He shows at any rate—and that is the vital point—how they affected one of their ablest contemporaries.

Bagehot's strong point, indeed, is insight into character: what one of his critics has called his 'Shakespearean' power of perceiving the working of men's minds To possess that power a man must be a bit of what is harshly called a cynic. He must be able to check the sentimentalist tendency to lose all characterisation in a blaze of light. His hero-worship must be restrained by humour and common-sense. Carlyle, the great prophet of that

creed, could draw most admirable portraits because there was a Diogenes behind the enthusiast; and an underlying shrewdness was always asserting itself behind the didactic panegyric. In Bagehot's case, again, this quality appears in the curious attractiveness for him of the more prosaic type of intellect. His article, for example, upon Macaulay shows the struggle in his mind. He accepts the contemporary estimate of that 'marvellous' book—the History—as was natural to a man whose youth coincided with Macaulay's culmination. He especially esteems a writer who can describe a commercial panic as accurately as M'Culloch, the 'driest of political economists,' and yet make his account as picturesque as a Waverley Novel. He feels keenly the limitations of Macaulay's mind: the incapacity ever to develop his early opinions; the 'bookishness' which made him the slave of accepted Whig formulæ; the 'chill nature' (perhaps the word is hardly fair) which made him prefer the prosaic and respectable to the 'passionate eras of our history.' Yet he also recognised what is perhaps too much overlooked, Macaulay's solid common-sense, obscured as it may be by the defects which give so antiquated and wooden an aspect to his political

doctrine. Bagehot, on one side, had strong affinities with the old-fashioned Liberalism in which he had been educated. Macaulay showed its merits as well as its defects. He represents that kind of 'stupidity' which Bagehot so thoroughly appreciated—the stupidity which is a safeguard against abstract theories. Macaulay, as Emerson observes, praised Baconian philosophy precisely because it meant by 'good,' good to eat or good to wear; and thought that its merit was 'to avoid ideas and avoid morals.' Bagehot could agree with Macaulay that 'ideas' were dangerous things. He shows in one essay how Bolingbroke was too clever by half. He complains in another that Lowe 'cannot help being brilliant.' He cannot talk 'the monotonous humdrum' which sends men to sleep, and which they suppose must be 'all right.' He has not the 'invaluable faculty' of diffusing the 'oppressive atmosphere of business-like dulness' which is 'invaluable to a Parliamentary statesman.' Lord Althorp was the ideal leader of the Reform Bill time because he was so intellectually clumsy. His mind 'had not an epigram in the whole of it; everything was solid and ordinary.' So Bagehot criticised Gladstone in a very interesting article (1860), complaining of

his 'incessant use of ingenious and unqualified principles,' combined with a 'scholastic' skill which enables him to prove that any two principles may be consistent. In an earlier article he had analysed with singular acuteness the character of Sir Robert Peel, to illustrate the thesis that a 'constitutional statesman is a man of common opinions and uncommon abilities.' He has to represent public opinion—the opinion, that is, of the average man; and it will come naturally to such a man to be converted quite honestly and yet just at the right time; that is, just when other men of business are converted. Originality and Byronic force and fervour would make that impossible. Byron's mind was volcanic, and flung out thoughts which crystallised into indestructible forms like lava. Peel's was one in which opinions resembled the 'daily accumulating insensible deposits of a rich alluvial soil.'

Articles in this vein, full of brilliant flashes of insight, show Bagehot's peculiar power. It is quaint enough to observe the audacious, rapid theorist devoting his brightest insight to a serious 'encomium moriæ' and becoming paradoxical in praise of the commonplace. He was quite in earnest. He admired no one more than Sir G.

Cornewall Lewis, the very type of the thoroughly prosaic, solid, utilitarian mind; and not the less that he was himself imaginative and, if not a poet, had marked poetical sensibility. The explanation may be suggested by the doctrine which he applied in his most valuable works. A scientific inquirer must accumulate knowledge of facts, for the whole fabric of science is based upon experience. But he must also be always speculating, co-ordinating, and combining his experience; his mind must be incessantly suggesting the theories till he hits upon the one clue that leads through the chaotic labyrinth which experience presents to puzzle us. Bagehot denounced and ridiculed the theorists who asked for no base of experience and placidly assumed that the fact would conform to the theory. So long as such theories prevail, there can be no stability and therefore no progress. 'Stupidity' is invaluable just so far as it involves a tacit demand that theories should be checked by plain practical application. But stupidity absolute —sheer impenetrability to ideas—was so little to his taste that a main purpose of his writing is to consider how it can be effectually kept under. As a dumb instinctive force, it wants a guide, and he is terribly afraid that it will become refractory

and end by being master. There is the problem which he has to solve.

First of all, we must see the facts before our eyes. Bagehot's greatest merit is that he perceives and complies with this necessary condition of useful inquiry. He illustrates a maxim which he is fond of quoting from Paley. It is much harder to make men see that there is a difficulty than to make them understand the explanation when once they see the difficulty. We build up elaborate screens of words and formulæ which effectually hide the facts, and make us content with sham explanations. 'The reason,' he says, 'why so few good books are written is that so few people that can write know anything.' An author 'has always lived in a room'; he has read books and knows the best authors, but he does not learn the use of his own ears and eyes. That is terribly true, as every author must sorrowfully admit; and probably it is nowhere truer than of English political philosophers. English statesmen had made any number of acute remarks behind which, one supposes, there ought to lie some general theory; but when they tried to say what it was, they fell into grievous platitudes and the conventional twaddle which is a weariness to the

flesh. They took their general principles from Aristotle, and their precedents from the days of John or Queen Anne; and something surely must have been learnt in the interval. Aristotle's remarks have become platitudes—perhaps because they were so wise; but they surely require a little fresh testing. Bagehot's book upon the British Constitution came like a revelation; simply because he had opened his eyes and looked at the facts. They were known to everybody; they had been known to everybody for generations; and yet, somehow or other, nobody had put them together. Every cog and wheel in the machinery had been described to its minutest details, but the theory supposed to be embodied in its working was hopelessly unreal. It was a kind of fossil erudition; and led to singular misconceptions, and, moreover, to misconceptions of grave practical importance.

Bagehot's main point may illustrate his method. When the Constitution of the United States was framed, the philosophy was supplied by the authors of the famous *Federalist*. They had read Montesquieu, who was a man of genius, but also a Frenchman. He had naturally taken for granted that the conventional maxims of English politi-

cians corresponded to the vital principles of the British Constitution. His disciples supposed that one such principle was the separation of the legislative from the executive power. This, says Bagehot, was the 'literary' and therefore the utterly wrong theory. The Americans naturally had George III. on the brain. George III. represented the executive in England, and had interfered unduly with the legislative. If the American President was the true analogue of the English monarch, the essential point was to provide security against this abuse. Carry out the principle of the division of powers more thoroughly; separate the President from the Congress; and there would be no danger of a Washington or a Jefferson becoming a George III. or a Cromwell. This involved a thorough misconception. The President was really analogous not to the king, but to the Prime Minister. To divide his functions from the functions of Congress would, therefore, be like making the English Prime Minister independent of parliamentary control. That would clearly involve a complete dislocation of the whole English system. The fact—obscured for a time by George III.'s personal influence—was that the Minister had really become the centre of the

executive power and the organ of the legislative power. The 'efficient secret of the British Constitution' was, therefore, not the division, but 'the nearly complete fusion' of the two powers. A vital change had been unnoticed because it had taken place by a tacit and gradual process. The Cabinet has no recognised position in our Constitution; its powers are defined by no definite law; and yet its development implies a profound constitutional change. The Cabinet is, says Bagehot, the 'hyphen' which joins the legislative to the executive power. Because the hyphen had not been forged by any legal process, the 'fusion' of powers which it indicated had been ignored. The two powers had coalesced by slow, insensible, and unavowed methods, and the coalescence was therefore supposed not to have taken place at all. The 'literary' theory not only failed to recognise, but implicitly denied, the essential fact. The radical change had been carried out under a mask of uniformity. The Constitution had come to embody a principle which was the very reverse of the ostensible principle; and as we had only looked at the external forms, we had spoken as though the prerogative of the Crown still represented the same facts as in the days of the Tudors.

When Bagehot pointed out that the Cabinet was virtually a Committee of the legislative body, and the real Executive elected by and responsible to the Legislature, he was simply putting together notorious facts. They had, no doubt, been more or less recognised. Yet he was not only clearing away a mass of useless formulæ, but almost making a discovery, and the rarest kind of discovery, that of the already known. He was exposing an error which had misled the ablest founders of the most remarkable of modern Constitutions. They were, without knowing it, exchanging the 'Cabinet' for the 'Presidential' system. Whether the Presidential system had or had not the disadvantages ascribed to it by Bagehot is a different question. At any rate it was true, as he said, that its founders, while intending to develop a system by accepting its ostensible principle, were really inverting it and acting upon a contradictory principle. To have disengaged the facts so clearly from the mass of conventional fictions was a remarkable achievement. Bagehot revealed a plain fact hidden from more pretentious philosophers who had been blinded by traditional formulæ.

Bagehot proceeded to draw conclusions which

seemed scandalously cynical to the young reformers who, when his articles first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, were proposing to 'shoot Niagara.' He admitted that the British Constitution was a whole mass of fictions; its ostensible principles were a mere cover for totally inconsistent practice; and yet that was one of its chief merits. It was a vast make-believe, involving an 'organised hypocrisy,' and for that reason the best of all possible Constitutions. We deify a king in sentiment as we once deified him in doctrine. 'This illusion has been, and still is, of incalculable benefit to the human race.' The 'theatrical show of society' impresses the popular imagination; and the 'climax of the play is the Queen.' . . . 'Philosophers may deride the superstition, but the results are inestimable.' A Cabinet Government is only possible for 'deferential nations': men who can delegate power to 'superior persons.' Public opinion is supreme, and public opinion is the opinion of 'the bald-headed man at the back of the omnibus'—whom, in modern slang, we call 'the man in the street.'[1] He is totally incapable of forming any rational opinion upon any political

[1] Emerson uses the phrase in the essay on Napoleon in *Representative Men.*

question whatever; but he can be impressed by his betters. He will choose a 'select few' to rule him. They, too, will be heavy respectable men, the 'last people in the world to whom, if drawn up in a row, an immense nation would ever give an exclusive preference'; but they will have sense enough to elect in their turn an Executive of capable statesmen. Carlyle and Bagehot agreed —what few people can deny—that men are 'mostly fools.' Carlyle inferred that they should be ruled by heaven-sent heroes; Bagehot, that they should be impressed by the 'shams,' as Carlyle would have called them, appropriate to sluggish imaginations. Bagehot delighted in his Somersetshire clown, who regarded the Crimean War as a personal struggle between Queen Victoria and the Emperor Nicholas and did not see how it could be ended till the Queen had caught the Emperor and locked him up. The clown, that is, can only understand loyalty to a person. To reach him you must represent general principles by concrete symbols.

The cynic's merit is to see facts; and these facts are undeniable. I have always wondered how some political theories can survive a walk through the Strand. People argue gravely, and

as if it were obviously true, that the sovereign power should simply sum up the opinions of its multitudinous component atoms. How many people would you meet between Temple Bar and Charing Cross who have any real opinion whatever, if 'opinion' implies any process of reasoning? They have blind instincts, no doubt, and strong feelings; but by what chemistry can the vague mass of ignorance and prejudice be transmuted into political wisdom? If 'stupidity' were enough, we should be in no difficulty. We have stupidity — massive, stolid stupidity — in superabundance. That is a great fact. But if stupidity is to be harmless, it must be a stupidity conscious of its own defects. Bagehot's pert French journalist was an adept in using the phrases to take the place of thought, and enable fools to think themselves philosophers. They took phrases for ideas; and cast aside not only the traditional maxims, but the practical wisdom really embodied in the tradition. English 'stupidity' went with docility, 'deferential' habits of mind, and therefore willingness to trust a select few. Bagehot argued in a very able article upon the 'unreformed Parliament' how, with all its abuses, it had more or less encouraged this invaluable tendency. The

whole system had trained us to act as became well-meaning stupid people, with just enough brains to recognise their betters. The doctrine takes fresh shape in his most popular book, the *Physics and Politics*. Bagehot had been profoundly interested in the discussions started by Darwin, and their bearing upon political questions. He was not, and did not in the least affect to be, an original inquirer. He followed the teaching of Mr. Herbert Spencer and Mr. Tylor—though with his own intellect always keenly at work. The book, therefore, is hardly an original contribution to the history of primitive societies, and his dogmas would, I suppose, often require to be stated as more or less plausible conjectures. What especially interests him is their application to contemporary problems. The methods which show how men grew out of monkeys might show how early societies grew out of savage hordes; and, then, as most of us are still, if not in the savage, in the infantile stage, how modern societies are actually held together. He invented the now proverbial phrase, 'the cake of custom,' to express one essential condition. Men can never emerge from pure barbarism till they are capable of forming a body of sacred inviolable laws to hold them

together. But, then, if the 'cake' be too solid, they will never get any further. They will crystallise into solid shapes which make progress impossible. How does the 'age of discussion' ever succeed to the age of custom? How does 'contract' succeed 'status'; or, in other words, how do men gain the right to settle their own lives instead of being wedged from birth into a rigid framework? 'One of the greatest pains to human nature,' he says characteristically, 'is the pain of a new idea': it is 'so upsetting.' How does so tender a shoot manage to pierce the soil hardened by sacred traditions? His answer suggests a doctrine which has been elaborately worked out (quite independently, I believe) in the singularly ingenious and suggestive writings of M. Tarde. Bagehot remarks that a force is at work in all times, which shows itself in savages and civilised races, in the greatest and smallest affairs, in making nations and starting fashions. That is the force of 'imitation.' He illustrates it by a literary instance. What, he asks, caused the rise of the Queen Anne literature? Steele—'a vigorous forward man'—struck out the essay; Addison elaborated it and gave it permanent value. Troops of other writers followed and

followed, in the main not of set purpose, but by unconscious imitation. The doctrine is, of course, Darwinian. The patronage of favoured forms corresponds to the preservation of the fortunate varieties. As Darwin argued from variation in pigeons to variation of species in general, Bagehot argues from a literary fashion to the most important processes of social growth. Religious doctrines, he says, spread not by argument, but by the attractiveness of the type; and a great political leader dictates the tone of the community. We were all frivolous under Palmerston, and became 'earnest' with Gladstone. Imitation is at work everywhere.

There are obvious criticisms upon which I need not touch. The full development by M. Tarde shows how many consequences may be, at least plausibly, deduced. 'Imitation,' thus understood, discharges a double function. It produces, on the one hand, the uniformity of life which is essential to civilised society. The stupidity or docility of mankind establishes the laws of conduct which are essential if we are to understand each other and to co-operate. If, on the other hand, the uniformity becomes excessive, individual initiative starts new types. The most effective will succeed, but in any

case is adopted by an unconscious instinct without foresight of results. The problem, once more, is to facilitate the play of this natural force ; for if the wise man imitates the fool, society will stagnate, while it is rather difficult to get the fool to see the merits of the wise. We have to face the old problem : Does not democracy lead to a dead level, and is not democracy incapable of recognising the best men? Bagehot felt that difficulty as keenly as other men to whom intellectual culture represents one main charm of life. Will not that 'bald-headed man in the omnibus' or the proletarian below him get the upper hand and set the fashion to be universally imitated? Bagehot was to a certain point conservative or aristocratic. The old aristocratic system had, in a blundering way, given a predominance to the select few. When the Reform Bill became necessary, the slow, clumsy intellect of Lord Althorp secured the passage of an undoubtedly beneficial measure. Unluckily, he was too clumsy. The aristocracy had intelligence, but very limited ideas, and had terribly missed its opportunities. It had properly abolished the old system which, after an awkward fashion, gave influence to the intellectual classes, but it had provided no equivalent. We have,

therefore, to face a tremendous difficulty; we have to induce this 'self-satisfied, stupid, inert mass of men to admit its own insufficiency.' That is hard enough; but it is still harder to suggest remedies, and hardest of all to secure their application. Bagehot discusses Hare's scheme, which Mill had recently declared to provide a panacea, and shows—unanswerably, I think—how it would only lead to the supremacy of caucuses and machine-made politics. He makes a suggestion or two of his own, life-peerages and so forth; but of them it is enough to say that the insufficiency is only too palpable. The democracy is too strong to be hampered by constitutional devices, and very unlikely to adopt any measures deliberately intended to fetter its own powers of action. 'I can venture to say,' he observes in the last addition to his book on the Constitution, 'what no elected Member of Parliament can venture to say, that I am terribly afraid of the ignorant multitude of the new constituencies. We may have a "glut" of stupidity.' Probably, the opinion and the reluctance to utter it are both stronger than when Bagehot wrote (1872). To the democrat, Bagehot's despondency will appear as a proper penalty of his cynicism. One

remark is suggested by his whole argument. His essential case is that the British Constitution depends for its excellence upon the elaboration of the purblind political instincts ; upon spontaneous 'deference' or docility ; upon the guided or enlightened 'stupidity' which corresponds to his favourite virtue, 'animated moderation.' It is obvious that if such instincts die out, no political machinery, neither Hare's scheme nor any other scheme, can create them. The problem, that is, passes beyond the merely legal and becomes essentially moral. Loyalty to the monarchy and 'deference' to the aristocracy, and, therefore, the corresponding institutions, could not, as Bagehot had insisted, be transplanted to America. No mere political institutions will preserve them if the corresponding instincts really decay. Bagehot had dwelt upon the utility of the 'theatrical' elements of the Constitution. It suddenly comes upon him that plain men will take this invaluable element to be superstition and humbug. When you let out the secret that the monarchy is really a part of a stage-play, it will cease to be an effective control of real life. That is the danger which has all along awaited his excessive valuation of 'shams.' His merit was to have shown more

clearly the foundations of the political edifice. If they begin to fail us, the problem of replacing them involves vast moral and social difficulties which lay beyond his peculiar province. They will give work for future generations.

The value of his clear insight into fact remains, and I have only to remark, in conclusion, how well it served him in one other inquiry. Bagehot called himself the last of the old economists. He had a strong sympathy with Ricardo, as with all the leaders of the old-fashioned do-nothing Liberalism. And yet he showed most effectually one of their weaknesses. His *Lombard Street* owes its power to his imaginative vivacity. Instead of the abstract 'economic man'—an embodied formula—he sees the real concrete banker, full of hopes and fires and passions, and shows how they impel him in actual counting-houses. So his discussion of the 'Postulates of Political Economy' is an exposition of the errors which arise when we apply mere abstract formulæ, unless we carefully translate them in terms of the facts instead of forcing the facts into the formulæ. When a dull man of business talks of the currency question, says Bagehot, he puts 'bills' and 'bullion' into a sentence, and does not care what comes between

them. He illustrates Hobbes's famous principle that words are the money of fools and the counters of the wise. The word currency loses all interest if we do not constantly look beyond the sign to the thing signified. Bagehot never forgets that condition of giving interest to his writing. Few readers will quite accept the opinion of his editor, that he has made *Lombard Street* as entertaining as a novel. But he has been wonderfully successful in tackling so arid a topic; and the statement gives the impression made by the book. It seems as though the ordinary treatises had left us in the dull leaden cloud of a London fog, which, in Bagehot's treatment, disperses, to let us see distinctly and vividly the human beings previously represented by vague, colourless phantoms.

# THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY

THERE are some compensations, I am beginning to think, in the reflection that by 1860 I was qualified, by age at least, to enjoy the spectacle of intellectual swordplay. In that year took place the famous encounter at Oxford between Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce. It was one incident in a remarkable outburst of intellectual activity. The old controversy between scientific and ecclesiastical champions was passing into a new phase. Darwin's teaching had not only provided a fresh method, but suggested applications of scientific principles which widened and deepened the significance of the warfare. A 'new reformation,' as Huxley afterwards called it, was beginning, and the intellectual issues to be decided were certainly not less important than those which had presented themselves to Erasmus and Luther. In the struggle which followed, Huxley took a leading part. He made original researches; he was the

clearest expositor of the new doctrine to the exoteric world; he helped to organise the scientific teaching which might provide competent disciples or critics; and he showed most clearly and vigorously the bearing of his principles upon the most important topics of human thought. Whatever his success, the strongest antagonist could not deny to him the praise due to a strenuous and honourable combatant. The most careless Gallio looking on from the outer ring might be roused to applaud the intellectual gladiator who could hit out so straight from the shoulder and fairly knock accomplished prelates out of time. We could admire 'Darwin's bulldog,' as he called himself, even if we felt some sympathy with the bull whom he pinned. Those who watched him from first to last will be glad to make a more intimate acquaintance with so grand a specimen of the fighting qualities upon which Englishmen are supposed to pride themselves. In Mr. Leonard Huxley's volumes they will find ample materials for filling out the more obvious and strongly marked outlines; and will end by adding to their respect for the sturdy, intellectual warrior a cordial affection for a noble and warm-hearted human being.

The method which Mr. L. Huxley has adopted

in the life of his father was clearly prescribed for him. The biographer can never quite equal the autobiographer, but with a sufficient supply of letters he may approximate very closely to the same result. Huxley's letters are fortunately abundant, and amount to a singularly clear, though quite unconscious, self-revelation. The book, it is true, is of considerable dimensions, but, in the first place, Huxley had so many interests that many topics require notice; and, in the second place, the letters are almost uniformly excellent. The common complaint of the decay of letter-writing is partly answerable by the obvious consideration that most letters of our own time are still lying in their pigeon-holes. It is true, no doubt, that only an Edward Fitzgerald or so here and there have the chance to write letters breathing the old-world charm of lettered ease and playful dallying with the humorous aspects of life or books. Huxley's letters were necessarily thrown out at high pressure; pithy statements of his judgment of some practical matter, or friendly greetings for which he can just find time between the lecture-room and the railway station. Their vivacity and constant felicity of phrase are the more remarkable.

R. H. Hutton remarked quaintly upon the quantity of 'bottled life' which Huxley could 'infuse into the driest topic on which human beings ever contrived to prose.' A more congenial phrase would perhaps be the amount of 'potential energy' which was always stored in his brain. It is convertible at any moment into the activity of a steam-hammer hitting the nail on the head in the neatest and most effective fashion. There are none of the flabby, tortuous blunderings round about a meaning, nor of the conventional platitudes of which so many letters are entirely composed; every word is alive. His mother, he tells us, was remarkable for rapidity of thought. 'Things flash across me,' she would say by way of apology. That peculiarity, says her son, 'has been passed on to me in full strength'; and though it has 'played him tricks,' there is nothing with which he would less willingly part. The letters often scintillate with such flashes, the brighter for the strong sense of humour which is rarely far beneath the surface. They vary from the simply playful to the earnest moods. He does not scorn even atrocious puns. But of course it is not the occasional condescension to 'goaks,' as he calls them, but the fine perception of the comic side of

serious matters which gives a charm to his casual phrases. Sometimes it shows itself in a bit of friendly 'chaff.' When Matthew Arnold has appropriated — unconsciously, let us hope — an umbrella at the Athenæum, Huxley slyly exhorts him to consider what that excellent prelate, Arnold's favourite Bishop Wilson, would have advised in a case of covetousness. An excellent example of grave logic conveyed in an apologue is the letter in answer to Cardinal Manning's defence of indiscriminate charity. Huxley had told an Irish carman to drive fast, and the man set off at a hand-gallop. 'Do you know where you are going?' cried Huxley. 'No, yer honner, but anny way I'm driving fast!' A phrase in a letter to Mrs. Clifford dashes out a quaint comment upon human nature. 'Men, my dear, are very queer animals, a mixture of horse nervousness, ass stubbornness, and camel malice, with an angel bobbing about unexpectedly like the apple in the posset; and when they can do exactly as they please, are very hard to drive.' This, says Mr. Leonard Huxley, sounds like a bit of his conversation, and in a very interesting description Sir Spencer Walpole remarks on that manifestation of his powers. Huxley, he says, could always put his finger on

the wrong word and always instinctively choose the right one.' In private talk, lecturing, and public speaking, he was equally conspicuous in the humorous felicity which so often marks his admirable literary style.

'Science and Literature,' said Huxley, 'are not two things, but two sides of one thing.' An aphorism in an after-dinner speech must not be too literally construed, but the phrase indicates the quality which makes Huxley's writings as refreshing to the literary as to the scientific critic. 'Exposition,' he observes, 'is not Darwin's *forte*. But there is a marvellous dumb sagacity about him like that of a sort of miraculous dog, and he gets to the truth by ways as dark as those of the Heathen Chinee.' The final cause of Huxley might seem—though the theory is a little out of place—to have been the provision of an articulate utterance for Darwin's implicit logic. He points an old moral for young literary gentlemen in want of a style. He does not believe in moulding one's style by any other process than that of 'striving after the expression of clear and definite conceptions.' First, indeed, he adds, you have to catch your clear conceptions. I will not presume to say that for writers of a different category a different

method may not be the right one. But most of us may heartily subscribe to Huxley's theory. The best way to be happy, as moralists tell us, is not to make the acquisition of happiness a conscious aim. To acquire a good style, you should never think of style at all. It will be the spontaneous outcome of adequate expression of clear thought. Some writers, Huxley admits, might have learnt dignity from a study of Hobbes, and concision from Swift and simplicity from Defoe and Goldsmith. The masters are significant of his taste; but he learnt by adopting their methods, not by imitating them as models. The labour which he bestowed upon his work is the more remarkable, considering his quickness in seizing the right word in his hastiest letters. He speaks of writing essays half-a-dozen times before getting them into the right shape. He had the passion, unfortunately rare in Englishmen, for thorough logical symmetry. His 'flashes' must be finished and concentrated. The happy phrase has to be fixed in the general framework. Arguments are terribly slippery things; one is always finding oneself shunted into some slightly diverging track of thought; and brilliant remarks are most dangerous seducers. They illustrate something,

but then it is not quite the right thing. Huxley gets his Pegasus into the strictest subordination; but one can understand that he had to suppress a good many swervings to right and left, and only found the lucid order after experimental wanderings into the wrong paths. The result is the familiar one. What is easy to read has not, therefore, as the hasty reader infers, been easy to write. An 'unfriendly' but surely rather simple-minded critic declared that the interest of Huxley's lectures was due not to the lecturer, but to the simplicity of the theory expounded. That is the same effect which Swift produced in the *Drapier's Letters*. He seems to be simply stating obvious facts. Huxley's best essays deserve to be put on a level with the best examples of Swift or other great literary athletes; and any one who imagines the feat to be easy can try the experiment.

Professor Ray Lankester, in describing this quality of Huxley's essays, points out also how this implies a revelation of the man. When Swift's tracts purport to give an unvarnished statement of plain facts and figures, we are all the more sensible of the fierce indignation boiling just below the surface. Huxley's resolution to be strictly logical and to be clear before anything

only forces him to exert his powers of vivifying the subject by happy illustration or humorous side-lights, or sometimes by outbursts of hearty pugnacity, and now and then by the eloquent passages, the more effective because under strict control, which reveal his profound sense of the vast importance of the questions at issue. He had one disadvantage as compared with Swift. If Swift wanted a fact, he had not many scruples about inventing it, whereas Huxley's most prominent intellectual quality was his fidelity to fact, or to what he was firmly convinced to be fact. This brings me to some characteristics strikingly revealed in these volumes. Huxley claims that he had always been animated by a love of truth combined with some youthful ambition. The claim, I think, is indisputable. Yet a love of truth must be considered, if I may say so, as rather a regulative than a substantive virtue. Abstract truth is a rather shadowy divinity, though a most essential guide in pursuing any great inquiry. It presupposes an interest in philosophy or science or history, and then prescribes the right spirit of research. Huxley was not one of the rare men to whom abstract speculation is a sufficient delight in itself. He was most emphatically

a human being, with strong affections and a keen interest in the human life around him. He had to live as well as to think, and to reconcile his intellectual ambition with hard necessities. The pith of his early story was already known in part from his autobiographical fragment. Further details make the picture more impressive. For a time he had to thrive under conditions which were only not blighting because his courage made them bracing. The school at which he got his brief training was a 'pandemonium.' He wished to be an engineer, but was forced to become a medical student against the grain. He found, however, a sufficient arena for the exercise of his awakening faculties. Physiology, 'the engineering of living machines,' attracted him, though he cared little for other parts of the necessary studies. From Carlyle he learnt a hatred of 'shams,' or perhaps rather learnt to give form to an innate antipathy to that commodity. Carlyle, too, set him upon the study of German, afterwards invaluable, and suggested some early incursions into the field of metaphysics. A fortunate accident afterwards forced him to spend four years in the *Rattlesnake*, where his personal accommodation, as he testifies, was not much better than Jonah's; where he had to pass months

without seeing civilised beings; where his junior companions were as indifferent as the Australian aborigines to his scientific pursuits.[1] He made friends of them not the less, and declares that the life on board ship, under sharp discipline, with a 'soft plank' to sleep upon, and weevilly biscuit for breakfast, was well worth living. It taught him to work for the sake of work, even if he and his work were to go to the bottom of the sea. He returned to England to find that some of his work had been appreciated, and to gain some warm friends. Still, it looked also as though a 'life of science' would mean not a 'life of poverty,' but a 'life of nothing,' and the art of living upon nothing, especially with a family, had not yet been discovered. Yet the desirability of living somehow had been enforced by the greatest blessing of his life, the engagement in Australia to the lady to whom he writes this account. He still feels, however, and he counts with complete confidence

[1] A naval officer wrote to rebuke me for a sentence which I have slightly modified. Huxley speaks very highly of his commander, Captain Stanley, and the remarks (see *Life*, vol. i. p. 49) apply to some of the junior officers, whom he nevertheless found to be 'as good fellows as sailors ought to be and generally are' (*Ibid.* p. 30). My correspondent thinks that they were equal to Huxley in scientific attainments. If so, Huxley did not find it out, and apparently took them for Peter Simples.

upon her sharing his feeling, that he is bound for his own credit, for the sake of his friends and of science itself, to keep his hand to the plough. How his persistence was rewarded, how he gradually emerged, secured in spite of vexatious delays a sufficient support to justify the long-delayed marriage and to carry on the task which he had accepted, may be read in these volumes. In later years, the duties of a husband and a father forced him to give up the line of research to which he had aspired. But he was not less working in the great cause of propagating what he believed to be the truth : fighting its enemies and organising its adherents. He was 'driven into his career,' as he says in his autobiography, rather than led into it of his own free will. Yet the dominant purpose was equally manifest, though stress of circumstances and conflict of duties might force him to set his sails to devious winds. If he could not select the career which ambition of purely scientific fame might have dictated, he would accept none which involved the slightest compromise with falsehood ; and probably took, in fact, the part most suitable to his peculiar cast of intellect. When Huxley took up the gauntlet for Darwinism, and first became widely known to

the extra-scientific world, his aspirations might be described with curious accuracy in the words of the poet whom he held to have appreciated most clearly the tendencies of modern scientific thought. The first speaker in Tennyson's *Two Voices* recalls the early phase when he listened as 'the distant battle flashed and rung': sang his joyful Pæan, and burnished his weapons,

> Waiting to strive a happy strife,
> To war with falsehood to the knife,
> And not to lose the good of life.

He was to carve out

> Free space for every human doubt:

to reach through

> The springs of life, the depths of awe,
> And reach the law within the law;

and finally to die,

> Not void of righteous self-applause
> Nor in a merely selfish cause

but,

> Having sown some generous seed,
> Fruitful of further thought and deed.

Huxley, indeed, never gave in to the despondency which led the second voice to recommend

suicide ; nor did he precisely accept the consolations which the first voice ultimately accepts in the sight of a lady and gentleman going to church with their daughter. He plunged into the war and found satisfaction in the simple joy of successful combat. When, thirty years after the round with Bishop Wilberforce, he again attended a similar meeting, and, veiling criticism in eulogy, welcomed Lord Salisbury's address as an involuntary testimony to the victory of evolutionism, he could look back with a feeling of triumph. A change of thought of unprecedented magnitude had been admitted even by the enemy. Some, indeed, held that the doctrine once scornfully rejected was to become the corner-stone of a new edifice of faith. In any case, if the chief value of a new speculation is even more in the fermentation which it sets up than in the results which it finally establishes, no one disputes the enormous importance of the Darwinian theories. I have sufficient reasons for not saying a word upon the part which they have played in the physical sciences. Their influence, however, upon other problems has been one of their most remarkable peculiarities. Huxley insisted upon such applications ; and I will venture — not, of course,

to examine his arguments, but—to note the characteristic position which they implied. Huxley remarks somewhere that he had learnt to be a judge of the art of controversy; to appreciate the skill displayed in the contest abstractedly from the merit of the positions defended. That may seem to imply a delight in battle for its own sake. The athlete rejoices in putting forth his power; and I cannot see my way to deny that Huxley was pugnacious. In fact, I both admire and envy a quality which indicates both courage and the spirit of fairplay. Huxley himself, indeed, was given to make frequent disavowals; his fights—they were many, he admits—were forced upon him; except, indeed, in two (or 'by 'r lady,' one is tempted to interject, some 'threescore') instances. What is the 'forcing' in question—who really began the fight—is a difficult question to answer in most quarrels. If a man has hazel eyes, according to high authority, another man who cracks nuts is obviously taking the aggressive. Huxley, while warning a younger man against quarrels, anticipates the obvious *tu quoque*, and explains that in his own case warfare had been a simple duty. The position is explained in one of his prefaces. He never, he declares, 'went out of

his way' to attack the Bible. The dominant ecclesiasticism thrust the book in *his* way, and marked 'No thoroughfare' where he claimed an indefeasible right of passage. He therefore brushed the barrier aside, and expressed his contempt for it with a slight excess of vivacity. Other men—his leader Darwin, for example—were content quietly to disregard the warning; to leave the destruction to be done by the professional critics or perhaps by the authorities themselves, who would presently explain that 'No thoroughfare' is equivalent to 'You are not really trespassing.' Huxley was not a man to suffer fools gladly, or to lay down a principle without admitting and emphasising its unpopular consequences. That might possibly show a want of prudence; but the alternative course may be imputed with equal plausibility to want of sincerity. Once, as Huxley admits, he showed 'needless savagery' in his early youth, and no doubt could use pretty strong language. His adversaries had set the example. The special constable in Leech's drawing says to the rough: 'If I kill you, it is all right; but if you kill me, by Jove, it 's murder.' If I call you a child of the devil, and sentence you to hell fire, says the orthodox, it shows my holy

zeal. If you call me a bigot or a fool, it is flat blasphemy. Huxley might plead that he was not bound to use the gloves when his opponent struck with naked fists. No one has a right to object to plain speaking; and the cases in which Huxley's plain speaking is edged with scorn are always cases in which he is charging his antagonists (as I, at least, think on very strong grounds) with want of candour. Refusal to withdraw a disproved personal allegation, or an attempt to evade the issue under a cloud of irrelevant verbiage, roused his rightful indignation. 'Thou shalt not multiply words in speaking' was, he observes, an old Egyptian commandment, specially congenial to him, and most provokingly neglected by a conspicuous antagonist. A plain speaker may be pardoned for resenting attempts to evade plain issues under clouds of verbiage. His pugnacity remained to the end; a challenge to a controversy acted as a tonic, and 'set his liver right at once.' But he cannot fairly be accused of a wanton love of battle. Forced by health and circumstance to refrain from scientific research, Huxley had taken up with all available energy the old problems of religious belief. He read the latest authorities upon Biblical criticism with singular freshness of interest and keenness of

judgment. He could not, of course, become an expert in such matters, or qualified to take an authoritative part in the controversies of specialists. But he was fully competent to insist upon one essential point, and even bound to speak, if it be a duty to propagate what one believes to be a truth of vast importance. His articles converge upon a principle which, if fairly appreciated, explains and justifies his method. In the long war between faith and science, one favourite eirenicon has been a proposed division of provinces. Reason and authority may each be supreme in its own sphere. Huxley argues that this separation is radically untenable. A historical religion must rest upon evidence of fact; and the validity of evidence of fact is essentially a scientific problem. When Protestants appealed from the Church to the Bible, they pledged themselves unconsciously to defending the Bible in the court of reason, and the old apologetic writers frankly accepted the position. They tried to prove fact by evidence. Whether Noah's flood did or did not really happen is a question both for the geologist and for the historian. One relies upon what is called 'direct,' and the other upon 'circumstantial' evidence, but the canons of proof are

identical, and the fact to be established is the same. If it cannot be established, the inferences, whether religious or scientific, must go with it. Some readers complained that Huxley was slaying the slain, and that it was as needless to disprove the legend of Noah as the story of Jack the Giant-Killer. The complaint was an incidental and perhaps not unnatural result of his method. His strategical instinct led him to seize the weakest point in the line of defence. He had occupied the key of the position; and though a guerilla war may still be carried on by people who don't know when they are beaten, their final defeat can only be a question of time. But that was just the point which hasty readers might fail to perceive. The disproof of the flood implied, as he held, the disintegration of the whole foundations of orthodox belief in the Hebrew legends. The argument about the Gadarene swine, as he admitted, seemed to some people to be superfluous—though one gallant antagonist still held to the truth of the legend. When, indeed, it branched out into the singular question whether the miracle, if it had taken place, would have involved a breach of the local laws as well as of the laws of nature, he apologised for his pugnacity by the incidental

bearing of his argument upon Mr. Gladstone's authority. But, as he fully explained, especially in his prefaces to the collected essays, the force of the argument is in the necessary implication. Accept the story, and you must admit the whole system of demonology, which is flatly contradicted by all scientific evidence. Admit its absurdity, and you destroy the authority of the witnesses to the cardinal points of the miraculous story—the supernatural birth and the resurrection—upon which the Christian dogmatic system is founded. The witnesses may record honestly the beliefs of their time, but they do not tell us upon what evidence those beliefs rested ; and their whole intellectual attitude prepared them to accept statements which now seem monstrous. The early Christians were still Jews, in theology as well as in demonology. There is no better evidence for the early than for the later miracles—that is to say, there is none worth mentioning. It tickled his sense of humour to call in Newman as an ally. Newman's doctrine of development admits equally that the Christian dogma was not taught by the primitive Christians, and that its growth was a process perfectly intelligible, and requiring no supernatural interference. When the admission of scientific canons of evidence

has compelled the abandonment of certain historical positions, the application of the same canons excludes the whole supernatural element of belief. Huxley, in short, presses a dilemma. You rely upon evidence. Rejecting altogether the *a priori* argument against miracles, he admits that sufficient evidence might prove any facts whatever, however strange.[1] But all evidence must be tested by appropriate canons of proof. If the proof involves the acceptance of an obsolete demonology, you must not accept it for theological and reject it for medical purposes. Frankly to accept the superstition implied in the Gadarene story is the only position logically comparable with orthodoxy, but it involves a declaration of war against science in general. Reject the superstition, and you have then destroyed the value of the evidence upon which you profess to rely. Men, whose ability is as unquestionable as their sincerity, have of course

[1] Huxley's position leads, I think, to a misunderstanding. If we accept Hume's sceptical view that anything may be the cause of anything, we might of course believe a 'miracle'—that is, an unusual event. A charm might cause an illness, as a medicine might cure it. But on that assumption the event ceases to be a 'miracle' in the sense of proving a supernatural cause. In other words, the argument from miracles supposes the legitimacy of induction from experience, or miracles could prove nothing. To quote Huxley's dictum in favour of evidence from miracles is therefore to accept an inconsistent position. But I need not go into the question here.

implicitly denied the force of this challenge. Theologians have assimilated evolution, even in the Darwinian form, and accepted the results of a criticism once supposed to be destructive without admitting the destructiveness. The final result remains to be seen, and I will only suggest that Huxley's challenge requires a plain answer. To accept the criteria of historical inquiry essentially implied in your methods, is to abandon the results of the old methods. To make the narrative thoroughly historical, must you not in consistency get rid of the supernatural? If you admit that the evidence is at second-hand, or given by credulous, superstitious, and uncritical writers, and is therefore worthless for scientific law, can it be sufficient for religious purposes? I merely wish to emphasise Huxley's position. He was not simply attacking mere outworks — excrescences which might be removed without damage to the structure; but arguing that to abandon them was to admit the invalidity of the whole system of orthodoxy. He was surely not trespassing beyond his province. The truth of religious belief cannot be a question for critical experts. If a man of science, or even of simple common-sense, is required to believe, he is entitled to inquire into

the method by which the belief is supported. The evidence adduced must be such as on the face of it to satisfy the general criterions of proof. Huxley's argument is that the testimony is by its nature not admissible for its purpose, and that to accept it would imply the abandonment of the most established scientific doctrines. He was therefore quite justified in asserting that he had not gone out of his way. A man of science may, of course, be content to write about electricity and leave Biblical criticism to others. But, in the first place, Huxley's scientific researches were on the very border where science and theology meet, and led directly to some fundamental problems. And, in the second place, he had been profoundly interested in the practical applications which concern a man of deep affections, and compelled both by character and circumstances to take life in deadly earnest. He had to pass through a sharp struggle and, as a brave man must do, had determined to come to a clear understanding with himself as to the aims and conduct of life. A very remarkable letter to Charles Kingsley exactly illustrates the point. It shows, as his son remarks, the genuine man more clearly perhaps than any of his writings. Huxley and his wife had suffered under the almost

crushing calamity of the sudden death of their first child, who had lived just long enough to become the apple of his father's eye. Kingsley, one of the most generous of men, though not one of the sharpest of dialecticians, had written a cordial letter of sympathy and taken occasion to set forth some of the beliefs in which he would himself have found consolation. Huxley replies at length, with a frankness creditable to both. He has no *a priori* objection to the belief in immortality. But it is totally without evidence, and the assertion that an unproved and unprovable doctrine is necessary to morality is altogether repugnant to him. The 'most sacred act of a man's life' is the assertion of a belief in truth. Men may call him whatever hard names they please, but they shall not call him 'liar.' The blow which had stirred all his convictions to their foundation, had not shaken that belief. 'If wife and child and name and fame were all lost to me one after the other, still I would not lie.' He speaks, as he says, more openly and distinctly than he ever has to any human being except his wife. He has been standing by the coffin of his little son, and his force and solemnity show how deeply he is moved. The clearness and moral fire are united as Mr.

L. Huxley says, 'in a veritable passion for truth.' The summary of his position reveals the secret of his life and character. He had learnt, he says, from *Sartor Resartus* that 'a deep sense of religion was compatible with the entire absence of theology.' Science had given him a resting-place independent of authority; and finally love had 'opened up to him a view of the sanctity of human nature, and impressed him with a deep sense of responsibility.' Any one who has passed through a similar trial can read one secret. 'Consolation' offered by well-meaning friends deserves the gratitude which Huxley expresses to Kingsley. Yet the suggested comfort becomes an unintentional but bitter mockery if it be not solid as well as sincere. Proof that your sorrow is founded in error might be infinitely welcome. But in proportion to the satisfaction which would be given by a real proof is the pang of recognising that it is a baseless assertion. It really declares, not that the belief is true, but that, if true, it would be pleasant. You are invited not to face your trouble, but to seek refuge in dreams. When unprovable assumptions are defended, not in some cruel crisis, but as an encouragement in the great battle of life, they encourage systematic self-deception,

and, when laid down as the ultimate ground of morality, they become not only empty but doubly corrupting. Huxley's hatred of shams meant the refusal of a brave man to shut his eyes, and scorn of men who deliberately provided convenient bandages for the purpose. His strongest conviction, as he says in the autobiography, was that the one road to the alleviation of human suffering was veracity of thought and action, and 'the resolute facing of the world as it is when the garment of make-believe by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features is stripped off.'

The religion reached from such a starting-point is of course not such as appears to most people to be a religion at all. Yet it is a system of belief which has been enough for the greatest minds. 'The only religion which appeals to me,' he writes to Romanes, 'is prophetic Judaism. Add to it something from the best Stoics and something from Spinoza and something from Goethe, and there is a religion for men.' The Stoics, as he says elsewhere, 'had cast off all illusions' and found in the progress towards virtue a sufficient end of existence. He valued even the orthodox dogma for the same reason. He was for Butler against the deists. Theologians had recognised

realities—though in strange forms. Predestination, original sin, the 'primacy of Satan in this world,' were a good deal nearer the truth than the comfortable optimism which culminates in Pope's doctrine 'Whatever is, is right.' Adherence to fact is the base of his philosophy. Agnosticism according to him means simply that you are not to accept as an established fact anything not fairly proved. It led to conclusions which appeared paradoxical to some readers. He used, as he says, 'materialistic terminology,' and repudiated materialistic philosophy. Physiology proves that, in fact, the brain is a mechanism and the organised body an automaton. Psychology shows equally that every phenomenon must, as a fact, be an affection of the mind; you must neither pervert nor go beyond fact. Materialism and Spiritualism are 'opposite poles of the same absurdity'—the absurdity of assuming that we know anything about either spirit or matter. The controversy is the result of trying to transcend the necessary limits of thought. The striking essay upon 'Evolution and Ethics' brings out another contrast. Evolution, he maintains, 'accounts for morality,' but the principle of evolution is not 'the ethical principle.' The ethical progress 'of

society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it.' The microcosm will have a long fight against the macrocosm, and 'may count upon a tenacious and powerful enemy as long as the world lasts.' These are the facts, and while giving hope for the future, he orders us not to indulge in any millennial anticipations. We see why he appreciates the truth implied in the 'primacy of the Devil.'

I cannot inquire, of course, into the validity or consistency of these doctrines. But they illustrate the concluding formula of Huxley's creed. Love, he says, has explained to him the meaning of 'sanctity' and 'responsibility.' The phrase perhaps might suggest a vein of thought not very congenial to Huxley's turn of mind. He was fully alive to certain misapplications of his text. 'The world,' he observes to Tyndall, 'is neither wise nor just, but it makes up for all its folly and injustice by being damnably sentimental.' The truer Tyndall's portrait of it, therefore, the louder will be the outcry. Nobody could be more heartily opposed to 'sentimentalism.' If I had space, I might illustrate the obvious fact by the admirable common-sense of his remarks upon political,

educational, and social questions. He is far too sensible of the gravity of the existing evils not to part company with the enthusiasts who believe in hasty panaceas and manufacture them out of fine phrases. To convert an amiable sentiment into a maxim of universal validity, to override facts and refuse to listen to experience, to 'drive fast,' like his Irish carman, without asking where you are going, was of course contrary to all his convictions. But the deep and generous interest in all well-directed efforts at alleviation is equally conspicuous. He was not an indiscriminate philanthropist; he hated a rogue and did not love a fool; and he held that both genera were pretty numerous. But he was a most heartily loyal citizen; doing manfully the duties which came in his way and declining no fair demand upon his co-operation. And the secret is given in the phrase about love. There is, for obvious and sufficient reasons, little direct account of Huxley's domestic life, and the allusions to his private happiness suggest more than could find overt expression. Yet the book cannot be read without a pervading impression of the life which lay behind his manifold successes and official activities. Like Wordsworth's 'happy warrior,' he was one who,

though endued with a 'faculty for storm and turbulence,'

> Was yet a soul whose master-bias leans
> To homefelt pleasures and to gentler scenes.

It was not merely that he was surrounded by a sympathy which strengthened him in his work and soothed the irritations of intellectual warfare; but that such a home makes life beautiful, gives a meaning to vague maxims of conduct, and deepens the sense of 'responsibility.' The happy warrior is 'more brave for this, that he has much to love.' The intensely affectionate disposition, combined with a high sense of duty, extends his interests beyond the little circle in which it is primarily manifested. That Huxley had his sorrows, felt with unusual keenness, is incidentally revealed; but we can see more clearly than it would be right to express openly, even were expression possible, what was the source of the happiness and continued vigour which threw brightness over his career.

One result is more open to observation. Men of science have their weaknesses and temptations. They are not always more free than their literary brethren from petty jealousies and unworthy lust

for notoriety. Huxley's life shows an admirable superiority to such weaknesses. His battles, numerous as they were, never led to the petty squabbles which disfigure some scientific lives. Nobody was ever a more loyal friend. It is pleasant to read of the group which gathered round Darwin, himself the most attractive of human beings. Huxley seems to have retained every friend whom he ever made; and one understands their mutual regard. His life proves what was already illustrated by Darwin's, how honourable and dignified may be a career honestly devoted to the propagation of truth, little as it brings in the way of external rewards. There is a kind of short history, as I fancy, given in the portraits in these volumes. He had been, as his mother assured him, a very pretty child; and the assurance convinced him that this was one of the facts which are strongly in need of sufficient evidence. The earliest portraits, in fact, do not suggest good looks: though they show a quaint, humorous face with a mouth clearly suggestive of the bulldog. But he improves as he grows older; and in the finest portrait we have the expression remembered by all who saw him; where the old combativeness is represented by the straight-

forward glance of the timeworn warrior, but softened by a pathetic glow of the tender and affectionate nature which blends so happily with the sterner expression, and shows the truly lovable converging from, and mutually blending with, the masculine nature.

# JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE

FROUDE is perhaps the most eminent man of letters of his generation who has not become the victim of a biography. I do not hold that the world has any claim for biographies upon the representatives of distinguished men. If they or theirs prefer silence I am inclined to applaud the refusal to gratify curiosity. Froude could undoubtedly have written a very interesting autobiography had he chosen to reveal the story of his inner life. As, however, nothing has been published, we must assume that if anything was written, it was not meant for the world in general. We must be content to be ignorant of what he alone could have told us. There are few notices of him in contemporary reminiscences; and though I knew him for many years, I could add nothing worth the setting down. I had, indeed, good reason to know that he could be very charming in personal intercourse, and that he was cordially

beloved by men who knew him most intimately, and were excellent judges of character. I may add, however, one remark: Froude impressed casual observers as somehow enigmatic. He was reticent to the outer circle at least, and incurred the usual penalty. Men who are shy and sensitive are often misjudged by their neighbours: they are supposed to be supercilious because they shrink from irritating topics, and cynical because they keep their enthusiasm for the few really sympathetic hearers. I have heard Froude accused of Jesuitism, of insinuating opinions which he would shrink from openly expressing, and even of a malicious misrepresentation of the man whom he chose as his prophet. I believe such a view to be entirely mistaken; but as Froude has left no 'Apologia,' and as I have no special source of knowledge, I shall only refer to the indications given in his published works.

The defects of Froude's historical writings became notorious. Freeman seemed to think that he was specially commissioned by Providence to expose their inaccuracies. He felt that he did well to be angry, and wrote in the spirit of a medical authority exposing some mischievous and too successful quack. To Freeman and to others,

moreover, Froude was not only a blunderer but an apologist for tyranny and a lover of religious intolerance. He became a byword with Freeman's disciples for all the defects which have to be cleared away before historical inquiry can be placed upon a satisfactory basis. Freeman's severity, probably excessive and certainly harsh, roused some sympathy for his victim. That Froude suffered from constitutional inaccuracy, made strange blunders even in copying a plain document, and often used his authorities in an arbitrary and desultory fashion, seems, however, to be admitted. Yet, if I want to know something of the Elizabethan period, I can nowhere find so vivid and interesting a narrative. The scientific historian directs me to wait till he has ascertained the hard skeleton of objective fact. Then, and not till then, it will be time to theorise or to make a picture. But, in the first place, I cannot afford to wait for another century, and even when the inquirer has done his work there will remain the difficulty of clothing the skeleton with flesh and blood. Unless I abandon all that makes history really interesting to anybody but the antiquary and the statistician, I shall still be dissatisfied. After all, too, the main facts are pretty

well ascertained. Darnley was blown up, whoever supplied the powder, and the Spanish Armada certainly came somehow to grief. Froude's imagination may invest those facts with a poetical haze. In reading him, I do not know certainly where fiction ends and facts begin. The history may be an 'impressionist' picture, coloured and distorted by the mirror in which the facts are reflected. But I can take that into account. I know that I am not to read with unqualified faith. I get such a narrative of the past as I should of the present if I confined myself to party-journalism. I must study writers of opposite prejudices, and superpose the pictures as well as I can. I must take the story, not as definitive truth, but as an aspect of the truth seen from a particular point of view. I get at least one important fact: if not the real persons, the images projected by them upon the imagination of their partisans; and to see for a moment as they saw is a help to understanding the ideals and the prejudices of the time.

Anyhow, Froude was a most skilful historical artist. I remember being startled many years ago by the assertion of a friend that Froude's style was superior to Macaulay's. My notions of style were then too crude to be shocked by

Macaulay's obvious faults of taste, his strained and tiresome antitheses, and the purple patches of glaring crudity. The graceful simplicity and restraint of Froude's style, the skill with which he makes a story tell itself and develops the drama without obtruding himself as showman, are less palpable to a youthful reader. I am not sure that I have not now become unjust to some of Macaulay's merits, both of style and substance. In one respect he has a great superiority. He had saturated his mind with knowledge of his period, and his marvellous memory and eye for the picturesque enabled him to illustrate every topic with graphic and unforgettable details. He had his prejudices, which often led to misinterpretation of facts; but he had also an omnivorous and disinterested craving for information. His opinions appeared to him to be so obviously true that he did not want to make out a case. He did not so much look at the facts through coloured spectacles as with eyes affected by constitutional colour-blindness. He therefore read with prejudice, but not in order to confirm his prejudices. It would not be just to accuse Froude of accepting the other alternative; but it is true that Froude's interest in history was to some extent an after-

thought, that he took it up mainly to illustrate certain principles and confined his attention to the topics directly relevant to his purpose. One cannot feel that he had become a contemporary of Elizabeth as Macaulay had made himself a contemporary of Queen Anne. He has only made acquaintance with the actors in order to 'adorn the tale' which, as he is convinced, will point the desired moral. On the other hand, Macaulay's prejudices are less interesting. We can no longer accept the complacent Whig optimism which, according to Matthew Arnold, made him the prince of the Philistines. His political platform strikes us as narrow and obsolete, and we find it hard to do justice to the sound sense combined with so limited an insight. Froude had at least the advantage of being outside a little political clique ; and if his common-sense was not trained like Macaulay's by active political experience, he had breathed a less confined atmosphere. He has ideals, political and religious, and does not mistake a particular political platform for a complete and satisfactory answer to the great enigmas of human conduct and history.

Then, however, the problem occurs, What was Froude's position, and how did he reach it? That

might have been cleared up by an autobiography. Some light is given in his account of the 'Oxford Counter Reformation.'[1] His father, he tells us, represented the old order: he was landowner and parson, a hard rider in his youth, and qualified in the opinion of his parishioners to 'lay a ghost' or try a poacher. He was a typical product of a quiet period of 'moral health' when doctrinal controversy had gone to sleep, but people found in religion a light upon the path of duty. We are generally told that the period was one of spiritual torpor and neglect of duty. Froude perhaps, like other people, saw the days of his youth through a beautifying haze; but it is rather odd to find him proceeding to a panegyric upon the state of things which was the outcome of that eighteenth century so steadily denounced by most followers of either Newman or Carlyle. The Oxford Movement, he says, broke up this idyllic state of things; and but for it, he declares, 'scepticism might have continued a harmless speculation of a few philosophers.' Newman and his followers had turned the world upside down. That looks like saying that the earthquake was caused by the first people whom it frightened out of their wits. But, with-

[1] *Short Studies*, vol. iv.

out taking a passing phrase too seriously, we may admit that Froude himself had been certainly one of those whose mental equilibrium had been destroyed. The elder brother, of whom he always spoke with enthusiasm, had been Newman's closest friend and ally. He was a 'high Tory of the cavalier stamp,' and took up the cause of the Church against the Radicals of the day, with no special taste for theological speculation. He went forward, says Froude, 'hesitating at nothing, taking the fences as they came, passing lightly over them all, and sweeping his friends along with him.' He had died before his brother went to Oxford; but it was naturally to be expected that the younger man would be welcomed as a recruit in the same cause. At Oxford, accordingly, he fell under the influence of Newman; and no one has spoken more emphatically of the fascinations of his leader. *Credo in Newmannum*, he says, became the genuine symbol of faith for him as for hundreds of young men. Newman's simplest word was treasured as an 'intellectual diamond.' His sermons made an indelible impression: he seemed to be 'addressing the most secret consciousness' of each of his hearers; and Froude, though startled by certain

conclusions, was at last profoundly impressed. How did the chain snap? What was the 'fence' which he refused to clear? Was it at the sermon which Froude describes so strikingly when Newman, after dwelling upon the Passion, gave an 'electric stroke' to his audience by the words, 'Now I bid you recollect that he to whom these things were done was Almighty God'? Froude gives a different explanation. He spent a year, after his degree, in Ireland, in the house of an Evangelical clergyman. The circle which he entered was thoroughly Protestant. It was part of a 'missionary garrison,' and its creed kept alive by antagonism to the surrounding element. The whole tone was devout and serious, without cant or affectation. The misery and squalor of the Catholic population suggested doubts as to the social effect of their creed. He had been taught at Oxford to despise the Evangelicals, and now he came to respect them and to regain his reverence for the Reformers. Protestantism, he suspected, after all, might have been a revolt against intolerable corruptions. Froude returned to Oxford to meet the uproar created by the famous Tract 'No. xc.' He was still sufficiently in sympathy with his old friends to be invited to contribute to the *Lives of the Saints*.

The task brought him to the dilemma which had perplexed Gibbon a century before. Was he to accept or to reject the miraculous legends which gathered round the mediæval saints? If he rejected them, must he not reject also the miracles accepted by Protestants? Newman had plunged him into difficulties in which he sought the help of very different guides. He had begun to read Carlyle, and had been led to Goethe and to German literature and criticism. The discovery that Evangelicals could be as saint-like as Catholics had been followed by the discovery that men of the highest genius and character could be radically opposed to both.

Many of Froude's contemporaries went through a similar experience. They discovered that there was a world outside Oxford and that the 'Movement' was but a collateral result of great changes in the whole current of European thought. Froude's special characteristic seems to have been the desire to find some definite guide. He could not, like Clough, remain simply in suspense. He wanted a leader to take Newman's place. His state of mind is represented by the two early stories: the *Shadows of the Clouds* and the *Nemesis of Faith*. They shocked respectable people at the

time, and were crude enough in a literary sense to deserve their suppression. The heterodox opinions which he avows have long ceased to possess the charm or the offence of novelty. The books have still an autobiographical interest. Froude protested against an identification of himself with the hero of the later book,[1] and it seems to be even more unfair (though the attempt has been made) to identify him with the hero of the first. That young man has been driven by the brutality of a public school and the harsh treatment of an unsympathetic father to become a liar and a sneak; and I do not suppose that Froude meant to confess that he deserved such epithets. He is, of course, using his own experience, and the young man in question has like himself been employed by Newman to write on the *Lives of the Saints*, and has been led presumably to the same reflections. He wonders that so keen an observer should have exposed him to so dangerous an ordeal. It has brought him into terrible perplexity. He still 'loves and honours and learns of Newman'; but he also 'loves and honours and learns of Carlyle.' He despises the miserable Anglo-Protestantism as a 'wretched enemy of all

[1] Preface to the second edition of the *Nemesis of Faith*.

that is bright and noble and generous.' He cannot accept, that is, a compromise, and yet cannot believe that the whole truth is on either side. He dies in an edifying but perplexed state of mind, listening on his death-bed to a pious declamation from Jean Paul. The other hero begins as a sceptic, but is induced to take orders. He finds his position unbearable, rambles abroad, forms a connection with another man's wife, is driven by remorse to the verge of suicide, is saved by a priest more or less representing Newman, becomes a monk, finds his old scepticism revive, falls into despair, and dies without leaving anybody to regret him. Indeed, there seems to be little enough to regret. A slight change would make the novels into edifying and orthodox tracts, showing how scepticism may sap morality. Froude explains that he accepts for himself the critical conclusions of his heroes. But he holds that it requires exceptional moral strength to resist the resulting dangers. The period, in Carlyle's language, was one of cant —of practical unbelief covered by hypocritical formalism; and a man who sees through the cant is too likely to lose the vital truth which once gave meaning to the now obsolete creeds.

A little story added to the *Shadows of the*

*Clouds* shows a preoccupation with further difficulties. He had puzzled himself over the origin of evil. External circumstances, he perceived—the truth is painfully clear—may lead the same person either to vice or to virtue, to the lowest degradation or to a happy life. He found in the Book of Job the grandest exposition and the best solution of the old problem of the apparently arbitrary distribution of happiness among the good and the wicked. He read Spinoza, and, like all competent readers, was profoundly impressed by the great vision of a universe of incarnate logic, though he repudiates the conclusion that we are throughout products of inexorable law. The essays[1] on these topics and upon New Testament criticism show that his literary faculty, at least, had developed very rapidly and found a more appropriate employment than novel-writing. He had been reading widely, though he does not claim to be more than an intelligent observer of the great currents of contemporary thought. He was by nature a literary artist, not an abstract reasoner; and he sought to find a solution by looking at the concrete history of the Churches instead of examining the philosophical basis of their

[1] *Short Studies*, vol. i.

doctrine. While oscillating like his hero between the opposite poles of Newman and Carlyle, he could agree with both upon one point—antipathy to 'philosophical radicalism,' political or religious. To him as to them it represented the evil principle in modern thought: materialistic and mechanical views of history, selfishness in morals, *laissez-faire* in politics, the 'pig philosophy' of utilitarianism, and generally the extinction of all that is elevating of the soul or beautiful to the imagination.

This aversion is manifest in one remarkable result. It suggests a thorough-going historical scepticism.[1] To attempt to make history scientific is to incur the danger of referring everything to mere physical causes, and to get rid of freewill and the spiritual and religious influences. To avoid this danger, he resorts to an extreme measure. He denies the possibility of even ascertaining the facts. History often looks like a child's box of letters, with which we can 'spell any word we please'; we have only to pick the letters and arrange them at our pleasure. Any philosophy of history can be proved: we may

[1] See especially the chapters upon 'History' and the *Lives of the Saints* in *Short Studies*, vol. i., and that on 'Scientific Method Applied to History' in the same, vol. ii.

show with equal ease that the world is, or that it is not, under a moral government; that mankind has always been progressive, or always stationary, or steadily degenerating. No testimony can be trusted. Patriots, politicians, and observers all manipulate facts, and philosophers are worst of all. He objects to all historical theories because they 'vitiate the observation of facts, without which the speculations are not worth the paper on which they are written.' But observation of facts is precarious. Whenever he has found an authentic explanation of some difficulty, it has 'almost invariably' turned out that the true motive of the actors had been entirely misunderstood. If so, it would seem we must indefinitely postpone all speculation and confine ourselves to the barest external circumstances. These rather impulsive assertions, however, did not correspond to his practice and, indeed, would justify the conception of history most opposed to his own. The denial that we can prove the race to be under moral government is followed by the assertion that history does prove one, and only one, lesson —the lesson that the world is 'built somehow on moral foundations'; that in the long-run it will be well with the good and ill with the wicked.

But this, he adds, is 'no science'; it is the teaching of the old Hebrew prophets. To teach us that or any other lesson history must possess at least some element of truth. Froude's reading of the *Lives of the Saints* had suggested a curious explanation. 'Two kinds of truth,' he declares, 'form the warp and woof, the coloured web which we call history'; truth of fact, briefly, and truth of poetry. The stories which Bede tells of St. Cuthbert may be incredible; but St. Cuthbert represents a noble ideal, and, moreover, an ideal which men actually tried to realise. Shakespeare is one great example of poetical truth. His cardinal merit is that he accepts the fact, and will not allow his view to be perverted by 'theorising' or by forcing his perceptions of human life and nature to mould themselves upon didactic conclusions. *Macbeth* would be perfect history 'were it literally true'; and the historian should write history like a Shakespearean drama. The history of some periods may be so written that the actors shall reveal their own characters in their own words; 'mind can be seen matched against mind, and the great passions of the epoch not simply be described as existing, but be exhibited at their white heat in the souls and hearts possessed by

them.' There, he says, we have all the elements of drama of the highest order—'where the huge forces of the time are as the Grecian destiny.' It is Nature's drama, not Shakespeare's, but a drama none the less.

The theory led him to a quaint dilemma in his life of St. Neot. If, he says, the story teaches a lesson, the lesson is equally good though the story be false; if it teaches nothing, it does not matter whether it be true or false. False stories, however, are apt to teach bad lessons; and at any rate, it is as well to say whether you are writing fiction or history; for a mistake of one for the other often leads to awkward consequences. Froude was probably in the ironical mood when he wrote about St. Neot: he was quite able to detect his bit of sophistry; but the view with which he plays, for he hardly means it seriously, illustrates his conception of history. Carlyle's *French Revolution* has given him a model. His own history is to take another great period. History is to be a sum of biographies. You are to know the real actors, Elizabeth and Drake, Philip and Mary, to make them as living and vivid as Shakespeare's Macbeth and Hamlet. Shakespeare, of course, has his weaknesses as a

historian. He cared nothing for the political events, except as providing dramatic situations. He had not read Hallam, and gives the history of King John without alluding to Magna Charta. He had not read the Waverley Novels, and cares nothing for 'local colour.' His Homeric Greeks and his ancient Britons are still Elizabethan. Froude was much better informed, and knows very well that constitutional and economical conditions have to be taken into account. But the aim is so far similar that the final result of the history, as of the drama, is to be the display of personal character. Theories about scientific 'laws' are immoral as well as untrustworthy; they substitute mechanism for volition, and make the hero the instrument instead of the originator of the great forces.

The 'dramatic' view of history supposes, however, a certain amount of theorising. What in the history of England is to correspond to the 'Grecian fate'? Froude praises Shakespeare for his want of 'didacticism,' and yet the drama of history must have a central idea. Henry and Elizabeth do not, like Hamlet, interest us simply as individuals, but as playing parts in a revolution of surpassing importance. History does teach

the one lesson that the right triumphs 'in the long-run.' Froude can theorise when he pleases, and an eloquent essay on 'The Conditions and Prospects of Protestantism' gives an account of the rise and decay of religions in general. Creeds have their periods of vitality, of established usefulness, and of 'petrifaction.' It is the 'very law of their being' that they 'should stiffen' into formalism. He could still, after parting from Newman, enlarge upon the central idea of Catholicism—the 'beautiful creed which for fifteen hundred years turned the heart and formed the mind of the noblest of mankind.' He could declare that the old monks were the true builders of our national 'greatness.' There was once (when is perhaps rather doubtful) a golden age, when men were sincere believers in an elevating ideal. But the creeds had 'stiffened' and the monasteries were in need of a Cromwell and a Henry. The place of the Greek fate is to be taken by the intellectual and moral revolt against the lying and corruption sheltered under the system which in its origin had corresponded to the noblest of aspirations. I have no quarrel with this theory. An adequate account of the great convulsions of the sixteenth century would

do much to reveal the true conditions of strength of nations and churches. Many scenes, moreover, in Froude's drama carry out the scheme with extraordinary vividness. The last volume, with the execution of Mary and the defeat of the Armada, makes a fifth act, with a catastrophe, artistically at least, completely satisfactory.

The dramatic view of history demands a hero—a typical embodiment of the force which is shaking mankind. To understand him will be to give unity of action to the drama and unravel the wild and chaotic play of conflicting powers. Froude's artistic instinct overpowered his historic vision when he chose Henry VIII. for the part. His true problem, I imagine, should have been to show how that very arbitrary and tyrannical person was enabled to carry out so much of his purposes, and to be accepted by so large a part of his subjects as the national hero. When Froude took him for an embodiment of high purpose and statesmanlike insight, and discovered that a man constantly acted like a brutal despot from the loftiest political motives, he undertook one of the most heroic pieces of whitewashing on record. The Protestant refused to accept such a champion, and the burly figure looked awkward in wings and

a white robe. As Froude advanced, the difficulties thickened. He became, I imagine, a more competent historian, and his elaborate researches into State papers enabled him really to throw much new light upon the period. He opened and worked to great effect a quarry of information which has yielded valuable materials to him and his successors. With all his skill, indeed, the intricate maze of diplomatic intrigues sometimes becomes tiresome, and distracts him from the main current of domestic history. The wise Poloniuses of the day were not as all-important and omniscient as they fancied. A grave Spaniard, plunged into the unfamiliar atmosphere of London, exposed to the solicitations of innumerable plotters, who told him whatever story was most likely to open his purse, could not be a good authority upon English sentiment. The rough sailor, Hawkins, saw this clearly enough when he bamboozled Philip out of £40,000 by pretending to be a traitor. Froude probably gives too much weight at times to his new sources. But another result is more important. If we are to take the history of the time as really governed by cabinets and diplomatists, the difficulty of finding any adequate hero becomes an impossibility. He had

started apparently with the belief that Elizabeth would take the leading part. The English nation was beginning its great career, and (he said in 1852) Elizabeth's plan was 'to recognise, to love, to foster, and to guide.' The 'grandeur and moral majesty of some of Shakespeare's characters' is 'far beyond what the noblest among ourselves can imitate.' That is due, not to the poet's genius, but to his faithful portraiture of his contemporaries. His 'great poetry is no more than the rhythmical echo of the life which it depicts.' When he came to look into the facts, this anticipation had to be modified. There were, undoubtedly, men of noble character, patriots and martyrs, whose grand qualities are thrown into relief by the catastrophes in the great drama. But it is clear, too, that there never was a time in which the noble was more intimately strangely mixed up with the ruffianly and the mean. The words quoted had been suggested by the Elizabethan seamen, of whose heroic spirit he was to be the best interpreter. Yet their heroic enterprise shades off into slave-trading, buccaneering, and something scarcely distinguishable from piracy. Their hatred of idolatry blends with a desire for the idolaters' silver. The higher the class the worse the

morality. The religion of the Scottish nobles was mainly, he admits, a desire for the estates of the Church. Murder was part of the normal process of carrying on the game of politics, and nobody would have objected to blowing up Darnley had the plan been carried out with a little more attention to decency. Massacres of helpless people were throughout Europe part of regular warfare. Solemn Cabinets discuss plans for assassination without thought of any scruple, and when Elizabeth hears that Philip had plotted her death, she takes it, as Professor Beesly remarks, 'in the way of business,' without the smallest resentment. Kings are religious enough to carry out the cruellest persecution, but utterly refuse to fight for the Church if their allies are likely to get the best of the plunder. Lying is so much a matter of course in diplomacy that one wonders how it could be expected to deceive. The question is not whether an ambassador lies, but why he has selected that particular lie. It seems a profoundly interesting world, but clearly not one which it was easy to represent as a battle between light and darkness.

Froude was roused to a resentment against poor Queen Elizabeth. She would not be a heroine. She got upon his nerves. She cared

nothing for creeds: she would not admit the papal claims to power over the English Church; but she hated Knox's Calvinism more than Philip's Catholicism. Instead of putting herself at the head of European Protestantism, her whole policy was to play off the two Catholic Powers against each other by judicious alternations of lying promises. She would not risk her throne for a cause. 'She preferred to lie and twist and perjure herself, and betray her friends'; and though at bottom her purpose was 'moderately upright,' she had no nice sense of honour to raise difficulties. She systematically induced other people to do her dirty work, and she shuffled out of her responsibilities and left her agents to their fate. She kept out of the fray as long as she could, and thought only of saving her pocket by a cheese-paring which was almost fatal when the great inevitable struggle came at last. If she finally succeeded, it was because she yielded to the ministers against whose advice she had struggled for thirty years. Her greatness was an illusion, due partly to the fate which forced her at last to accept the policy of wiser men and partly to the stupendous run of luck which saved her from the consequences of her blunders.

Froude's moral had got him into dilemmas. Henry VIII. had been an awkward hero, but Elizabeth declined to be a heroine at all. She succeeded, in spite of her unfitness for the part, or, as may be held, because of it. The success suggests a *primâ facie* presumption that a policy of compromise was the fittest for the time. Froude had to explain it as an accident because it would not confirm the great lesson of history which condemns all compromise with evil. And then one has to ask, Did Froude really believe that the thorough-going Protestantism represented the truth and nothing but the truth? Was the religion of Knox so wholly in the right that its triumph was unequivocally desirable? Clearly the concrete Protestant, on his showing, was, with one or two noble exceptions, anything but a purely unselfish and lofty-minded hero. He accepts the teaching of Knox, but did not doubt that Knox's creed, like others, might stiffen into unlovely formalism. He has to believe in the whole Protestant legend for the time, and therefore identify himself with one extreme, and so far fails to rise to the level of world history. To set forth a great drama, where the truth slowly emerges from a confused conflict, the historian

must rise above sectarian prejudices, and admit a more intricate mixture of good and evil. The merit of Carlyle's prose-epic of the French Revolution is that he sees it as a gigantic convulsion, with tremendous issues imperfectly visible to the actors, where, therefore, we can admire great passions without accepting the party watchwords, and pity the victims, though admitting the necessity of their fate. Even when Carlyle apologises for Cromwell and Frederick, his heroes are, at least as he conceives them, embodiments of profound insight into the cosmic forces which are crushing or remoulding the old order. Froude is applying the method of hero worship in an inappropriate sphere, and without the glooms and splendours of Carlyle's imagination. He takes a side when he ought to see that the evolution of the great drama can only be rightly judged from a position of detachment.

One feels, in fact, that Froude's zeal has a touch of the factitious. His position is shown by his view of the two great types represented by Erasmus and Luther. The scholar and thinker desires that superstition may be dispersed, and abuses refined from above. But to appeal to the stupid masses is to let loose all the

brute forces of destruction, and only to substitute one superstition for another. The rough enthusiast blurts out his convictions; or, as he puts it, speaks the plain truth and disregards the consequences. Froude could appreciate Erasmus, but his position always forces him to approve Luther. By temperament, I think, he was really of the Erasmus persuasion. Nobody could be more convinced of human stupidity; of the imperfections of all creeds, and the futility of the ordinary Utopias. If he had written his history from this point of view, he might have drawn a forcible picture of the process by which the human race blunders along; each side mistaking partial truth for the whole; masking selfish and grovelling motives under a professed love of truth, and persecuting and massacring in the name of pure religion. He would have been an impartial, if a pessimistic, observer, and to him, as to Gibbon, history would have been a long register of crime, folly, and misfortune. But Froude was an Erasmus in need of a Luther. He must have some prophet to follow, and has taken Carlyle for his Luther. He and Ruskin were the master's two disciples. Ruskin's pessimism and contempt for the popular creed were as vehement as Froude's.

Yet he could attract disciples, because, however wayward his doctrines, he could be a genuine enthusiast. Froude's enthusiasm is fitful, and suggests despondency as the definitive result. He gives the worst turn to Carlyle's doctrine of the identity of might and right. Carlyle started with a profound sympathy for the aims of the revolutionists; he was a man of the people, with their democratic instinct, if radically opposed to some democratic theories. The worshipper of Cromwell could still gain the sympathies of Irish Nationalists, because they had a common hatred for misgovernment. No Irishman, on the other hand, could fail to be offended by Froude's *English in Ireland.* It is vigorously written, and may be read as a continuous exposure of English misrule. But it is the most unpleasant of Froude's books, because of the strange tendency to take an offensive ground. The penal laws, he declares, made little scandal in England because they succeeded. They have been denounced in Ireland because they failed; and he deliberately holds that a rigid and consistent suppression of Catholicism would have been the right policy for England. Froude can never speak of persecution without a wish to find apologies for the persecutor. There

is much to be said for strong government and thoroughgoing convictions. But when the belief springs from intellectual timidity, and suggests underlying scepticism, the result is unpleasant. Froude seems to believe in fanaticism, though he does not really share the fanatic's belief.

He ought (using the word in the artistic sense) to have been a refined and sensitive critic, shuddering at the brutalities of the great human tragedy, where the truest and purest causes can only work by turning to account savage and stupid passions. That might be unpleasantly pessimistic and sceptical ; but then his pessimism and scepticism shows through the superficial enthusiasm. Take your hero as simply the embodiment of great cosmic or providential forces, and you may have some sympathy for his antagonists as for the victims of a pestilence or an earthquake. But Froude at once recognises the ugly side, and feels bound to condone the offence. The tyranny and persecution are not regarded even as a painful and hideous necessity under the perverse conditions of life, but as somehow justifiable in themselves. He has to defend cruelty, and to still the hatred by which it was prompted.

That, I take it, partly explains his attitude to

Carlyle. The curious thing was that a man of such fine literary sense should have so entirely miscalculated the effect upon his readers. He fancied that he was providing a pedestal for the object of his reverence, when he was really placing him on a pillory. Ardent Carlyleans thought that he must have known what he was doing, and imagined that he was satisfying some covert resentment. Froude, I think, committed certain errors which I cannot here discuss. But I fully believe that his intentions were what he avowed. He was, no doubt, fully sensible of his master's failings. Froude, with his refined and sensitive temperament, was the very man to be shocked by Carlyle's rough and masterful dogmatism. When, for instance, Carlyle told him that Newman had the brain of a moderate-sized rabbit, Froude could not but feel that the estimate—if half humorous—showed a certain crudeness. The new guide was a little hard upon his predecessor. But then it was also satisfactory to have a master who could be so thoroughly confident. The dogmatism was delightful and comforting, and gave a sense of security. Froude liked to shield himself behind the uncompromising champion. The biography throughout shows that he was even keenly sensible to Carlyle's

arrogance, and yet felt it as a valuable support. Carlyle might be rough, but he could sweep away any misgivings with delightful positiveness. When Froude became aware of the revelations in Mrs. Carlyle's journal he could feel, even more keenly than most people, the painful side. But then they illustrated just this masterful temper, which, if sometimes startling, was yet so comfortable a support to a weaker brother. Froude's half-suppressed scepticism made him value the uncompromising dogmatism. The sentiment, too, gave dramatic unity to the biography which his artistic instinct appreciated. He went on to read earlier letters with this preconception and, according to Professor Norton the only other reader, to misrepresent the whole story. Such a faculty for misrepresentation is too often shown in his history, and the fact also shows that he might yield to it without any bad intention. In truth, he seems to have expected that his readers would be as ready as himself to condone Carlyle's faults of temper, and regard his posthumous confession as so 'supremely honourable' as to be an ample atonement for the offence. He, unluckily, succeeded in exaggerating the faults, without carrying his readers along with him in the implied apology. They did not appreciate

the charm, which to him was so obvious, of the despotic side of Carlyle's character. That was the real difficulty. Froude was, I believe, as loyal to his master's memory as he had been affectionate to him in life. The loyalty did not prevent him from forcing the shades as well as the lights, and he was quite right in his desire to delineate both in his portrait. What he did not see was that the merit which, for him, altogether overbalanced the faults, was not a merit at all for the outside world. He could excuse the harshness of a despot, whose rule he loved, but to people who objected to the despotic rule altogether, the excuse was an aggravation.

Froude's history was necessarily unsatisfactory on what may be called the scientific side. The hero-worshipper cannot stoop to such prosaic matters as economical or constitutional conditions. J. R. Green says that Froude's great fault was that in a history of England he had omitted the English people. The centre of interest, at any rate, is in the leading personages of the drama, and too much is attributed to their individual characteristics. Accepting Froude's conception, however, it would be difficult to praise the execution too highly. No man of his generation, I

think, had a finer literary faculty. While entirely free from the mannerism of his prophet, he can be equally vivid. His style is thoroughly masculine, and yet never flat, prosaic, or violent. The other writings upon which I have not dwelt—the lectures at Oxford, for example, the *Oceana*, and the *Short Studies*—are full of delightful reading. I have spoken of him from one point of view in the attempt to understand why with his extraordinary gifts he did not produce a more satisfactory result. The general answer seems to be obvious. He suffered from the epidemic which prevailed at Oxford at his time: the 'sick fatigue' and 'languid doubt' of which Matthew Arnold speaks, and which was generated by the controversies which then raged at Oxford. It may seem to us of a later period rather surprising that any man could fancy that either Newman or Carlyle could be a prophet to follow blindly. One cannot quite realise the narrowness of the Oxford horizon at the time (I don't mean that other places were at all better off) in which the only alternatives seemed to be the acceptance of intellectual suicide with Newman or of adherence to the modified Puritanism of Carlyle. The young gentlemen of the day would have been the better for a little more acquaintance

with other European thought, and for some acquaintance with scientific tendencies. Many of them became wiser in time. Froude learnt much, but never, as it seems, got over the shock which he had received. His weakness, I fancy, was a kind of intellectual timidity. He holds by Carlyle, but is always half afraid that his anchor may drag. He was afraid, and not alone in his fear, that the moral order of the world was being sapped by scepticism. That may be, as I should hold it to be, a mistake; but we may heartily respect the man whose hostility to agnosticism is a product of strong, even if mistaken, moral convictions. That I take to have been Froude's case. The misfortune was that his position led him to a sympathy with despotic remedies for the supposed disease, which made many readers suspect the reality of his moral sentiments instead of allowing for their accidental misdirection.

## IN PRAISE OF WALKING

As a man grows old, he is told by some moralists that he may find consolation for increasing infirmities in looking back upon a well-spent life. No doubt such a retrospect must be very agreeable, but the question must occur to many of us whether our life offers the necessary materials for self-complacency. What part of it, if any, has been well spent? To that I find it convenient to reply, for my own purposes, any part in which I thoroughly enjoyed myself. If it be proposed to add 'innocently,' I will not quarrel with the amendment. Perhaps, indeed, I may have a momentary regret for some pleasures which do not quite deserve that epithet, but the pleasure of which I am about to speak is obtrusively and pre-eminently innocent. Walking is among recreations what ploughing and fishing are among industrial labours: it is primitive and simple; it brings us into contact with mother earth and

unsophisticated nature; it requires no elaborate apparatus and no extraneous excitement. It is fit even for poets and philosophers, and he who can thoroughly enjoy it must have at least some capacity for worshipping the 'cherub Contemplation.' He must be able to enjoy his own society without the factitious stimulants of the more violent physical recreations. I have always been a humble admirer of athletic excellence. I retain, in spite of much head-shaking from wise educationalists, my early veneration for the heroes of the river and the cricket-field. To me they have still the halo which surrounded them in the days when 'muscular Christianity' was first preached and the whole duty of man said to consist in fearing God and walking a thousand miles in a thousand hours. I rejoice unselfishly in these later days to see the stream of bicyclists restoring animation to deserted highroads or to watch even respected contemporaries renewing their youth in the absorbing delights of golf. While honouring all genuine delight in manly exercises, I regret only the occasional admixture of lower motives which may lead to its degeneration. Now it is one merit of walking that its real devotees are little exposed to such temptations. Of course

there are such things as professional pedestrians making 'records' and seeking the applause of the mob. When I read of the immortal Captain Barclay performing his marvellous feats, I admire respectfully, but I fear that his motives included a greater admixture of vanity than of the emotions congenial to the higher intellect. The true walker is one to whom the pursuit is in itself delightful; who is not indeed priggish enough to be above a certain complacency in the physical prowess required for his pursuit, but to whom the muscular effort of the legs is subsidiary to the 'cerebration' stimulated by the effort; to the quiet musings and imaginings which arise most spontaneously as he walks, and generate the intellectual harmony which is the natural accompaniment to the monotonous tramp of his feet. The cyclist or the golf-player, I am told, can hold such intercourse with himself in the intervals of striking the ball or working his machine. But the true pedestrian loves walking because, so far from distracting his mind, it is favourable to the equable and abundant flow of tranquil and half-conscious meditation. Therefore I should be sorry if the pleasures of cycling or any other recreation tended to put out of fashion the habit of the good old walking-tour.

For my part, when I try to summon up remembrance of 'well-spent' moments, I find myself taking a kind of inverted view of the past; inverted, that is, so far as the accidental becomes the essential. If I turn over the intellectual album which memory is always compiling, I find that the most distinct pictures which it contains are those of old walks. Other memories of incomparably greater intrinsic value coalesce into wholes. They are more massive but less distinct. The memory of a friendship that has brightened one's whole life survives not as a series of incidents but as a general impression of the friend's characteristic qualities due to the superposition of innumerable forgotten pictures. I remember him, not the specific conversations by which he revealed himself. The memories of walks, on the other hand, are all localised and dated; they are hitched on to particular times and places; they spontaneously form a kind of calendar or connecting thread upon which other memories may be strung. As I look back, a long series of little vignettes presents itself, each representing a definite stage of my earthly pilgrimage summed up and embodied in a walk. Their background of scenery recalls places once familiar, and the thoughts

associated with the places revives thoughts of the contemporary occupations. The labour of scribbling books happily leaves no distinct impression, and I would forget that it had ever been undergone; but the picture of some delightful ramble includes incidentally a reference to the nightmare of literary toil from which it relieved me. The author is but the accidental appendage of the tramp. My days are bound each to each not by 'natural piety' (or not, let me say, by natural piety alone) but by pedestrian enthusiasm. The memory of school days, if one may trust to the usual reminiscences, generally clusters round a flogging, or some solemn words from the spiritual teacher instilling the seed of a guiding principle of life. I remember a sermon or two rather ruefully; and I confess to memories of a flogging so unjust that I am even now stung by the thought of it. But what comes most spontaneously to my mind is the memory of certain strolls, 'out of bounds,' when I could forget the Latin grammar, and enjoy such a sense of the beauties of nature as is embodied for a child in a pond haunted by water-rats, or a field made romantic by threats of 'man-traps and spring-guns.' Then, after a crude fashion, one was becoming more or

less of a reflecting and individual being, not a mere automaton set in movement by pedagogic machinery.

The day on which I was fully initiated into the mysteries is marked by a white stone. It was when I put on a knapsack and started from Heidelberg for a march through the Odenwald. Then I first knew the delightful sensation of independence and detachment enjoyed during a walking tour. Free from all bothers of railway time-tables and extraneous machinery, you trust to your own legs, stop when you please, diverge into any track that takes your fancy, and drop in upon some quaint variety of human life at every inn where you put up for the night. You share for the time the mood in which Borrow settled down in the dingle after escaping from his bondage in the publishers' London slums. You have no dignity to support, and the dress-coat of conventional life has dropped into oblivion, like the bundle from Christian's shoulders. You are in the world of Lavengro, and would be prepared to take tea with Miss Isopel Berners or with the Welsh preacher who thought that he had committed the unpardonable sin. Borrow, of course, took the life more seriously than the literary

gentleman who is only escaping on ticket-of-leave from the prison-house of respectability, and is quite unequal to a personal conflict with 'blazing Bosville'—the flaming tinman. He is only dipping in the element where his model was thoroughly at home. I remember, indeed, one figure in that first walk which I associate with Benedict Moll, the strange treasure-seeker whom Borrow encountered in his Spanish rambles. My acquaintance was a mild German innkeeper, who sat beside me on a bench while I was trying to assimilate certain pancakes, the only dinner he could provide, still fearful in memory, but just attackable after a thirty-miles tramp. He confided to me that, poor as he was, he had discovered the secret of perpetual motion. He kept his machine upstairs, where it discharged the humble duty of supplying the place of a shoeblack ; but he was about to go to London to offer it to a British capitalist. He looked wistfully at me as possibly a capitalist in (very deep) disguise, and I thought it wise to evade a full explanation. I have not been worthy to encounter many of such quaint incidents and characters as seem to have been normal in Borrow's experience; but the first walk, commonplace enough, remains distinct in my memory.

I kept no journal, but I could still give the narrative day by day—the sights which I dutifully admired and the very state of my bootlaces. Walking tours thus rescue a bit of one's life from oblivion. They play in one's personal recollections the part of those historical passages in which Carlyle is an unequalled master ; the little islands of light in the midst of the darkening gloom of the past, on which you distinguish the actors in some old drama actually alive and moving. The devotee of other athletic sports remembers special incidents : the occasion on which he hit a cricket-ball over the pavilion at Lord's, or the crab which he caught as his boat was shooting Barnes Bridge. But those are memories of exceptional moments of glory or the reverse, and apt to be tainted by vanity or the spirit of competition. The walks are the unobtrusive connecting thread of other memories, and yet each walk is a little drama in itself, with a definite plot with episodes and catastrophes, according to the requirements of Aristotle ; and it is naturally interwoven with all the thoughts, the friendships, and the interests that form the staple of ordinary life.

Walking is the natural recreation for a man who desires not absolutely to suppress his intellect

but to turn it out to play for a season. All great men of letters have, therefore, been enthusiastic walkers (exceptions, of course, excepted). Shakespeare, besides being a sportsman, a lawyer, a divine, and so forth, conscientiously observed his own maxim, 'Jog on, jog on, the footpath way'; though a full proof of this could only be given in an octavo volume. Anyhow, he divined the connection between walking and a 'merry heart'; that is, of course, a cheerful acceptance of our position in the universe founded upon the deepest moral and philosophical principles. His friend, Ben Jonson, walked from London to Scotland. Another gentleman of the period (I forget his name) danced from London to Norwich. Tom Coryate hung up in his parish church the shoes in which he walked from Venice and then started to walk (with occasional lifts) to India. Contemporary walkers of more serious character might be quoted, such as the admirable Barclay, the famous Quaker apologist, from whom the great Captain Barclay inherited his prowess. Every one, too, must remember the incident in Walton's *Life of Hooker*. Walking from Oxford to Exeter, Hooker went to see his godfather, Bishop Jewel, at Salisbury. The bishop said that he would lend him

'a horse which hath carried me many a mile, and, I thank God, with much ease,' and 'presently delivered into his hands a walking staff with which he professed he had travelled through many parts of Germany.' He added ten groats and munificently promised ten groats more when Hooker should restore the 'horse.' When, in later days, Hooker once rode to London, he expressed more passion than that mild divine was ever known to show upon any other occasion against a friend who had dissuaded him from 'footing it.' The hack, it seems, 'trotted when he did not,' and discomposed the thoughts which had been soothed by the walking staff. His biographer must be counted, I fear, among those who do not enjoy walking without the incidental stimulus of sport. Yet the *Compleat Angler* and his friends start by a walk of twenty good miles before they take their 'morning draught.' Swift, perhaps, was the first person to show a full appreciation of the moral and physical advantages of walking. He preached constantly upon this text to Stella, and practised his own advice. It is true that his notions of a journey were somewhat limited. Ten miles a day was his regular allowance when he went from London to Holyhead, but then he spent time in

lounging at wayside inns to enjoy the talk of the tramps and ostlers. The fact, though his biographers are rather scandalised, shows that he really appreciated one of the true charms of pedestrian expeditions. Wesley is generally credited with certain moral reforms, but one secret of his power is not always noticed. In his early expeditions he went on foot to save horse hire, and made the great discovery that twenty or thirty miles a day was a wholesome allowance for a healthy man. The fresh air and exercise put 'spirit into his sermons,' which could not be rivalled by the ordinary parson of the period, who too often passed his leisure lounging by his fireside. Fielding points the contrast. Trulliber, embodying the clerical somnolence of the day, never gets beyond his pig-sties, but the model Parson Adams steps out so vigorously that he distances the stage-coach, and disappears in the distance rapt in the congenial pleasures of walking and composing a sermon. Fielding, no doubt, shared his hero's taste, and that explains the contrast between his vigorous naturalism and the sentimentalism of Richardson, who was to be seen, as he tells us, 'stealing along from Hammersmith to Kensington with his eyes on the ground, propping his unsteady

limbs with a stick.' Even the ponderous Johnson used to dissipate his early hypochondria by walking from Lichfield to Birmingham and back (thirty-two miles), and his later melancholy would have changed to a more cheerful view of life could he have kept up the practice in his beloved London streets. The literary movement at the end of the eighteenth century was obviously due in great part, if not mainly, to the renewed practice of walking. Wordsworth's poetical autobiography shows how every stage in his early mental development was connected with some walk in the Lakes. The sunrise which startled him on a walk after a night spent in dancing first set him apart as a 'dedicated spirit.' His walking tour in the Alps—then a novel performance—roused him to his first considerable poem. His chief performance is the record of an excursion on foot. He kept up the practice, and De Quincey calculates somewhere what multiple of the earth's circumference he had measured on his legs, assuming, it appears, that he averaged ten miles a day. De Quincey himself, we are told, slight and fragile as he was, was a good walker, and would run up a hill 'like a squirrel.' Opium-eating is not congenial to walking, yet even Coleridge, after beginning the habit,

speaks of walking forty miles a day in Scotland, and, as we all know, the great manifesto of the new school of poetry, the Lyrical Ballads, was suggested by the famous walk with Wordsworth, when the first stanzas of the *Ancient Mariner* were composed. A remarkable illustration of the wholesome influence might be given from the cases of Scott and Byron. Scott, in spite of his lameness, delighted in walks of twenty and thirty miles a day, and in climbing crags, trusting to the strength of his arms to remedy the stumblings of his foot. The early strolls enabled him to saturate his mind with local traditions, and the passion for walking under difficulties showed the manly nature which has endeared him to three generations. Byron's lameness was too severe to admit of walking, and therefore all the unwholesome humours which would have been walked off in a good cross-country march accumulated in his brain and caused the defects, the morbid affectation and perverse misanthropy, which half ruined the achievement of the most masculine intellect of his time.

It is needless to accumulate examples of a doctrine which will no doubt be accepted as soon as it is announced. Walking is the best of

panaceas for the morbid tendencies of authors. It is, I need only observe, as good for reasoners as for poets. The name of 'peripatetic' suggests the connection. Hobbes walked steadily up and down the hills in his patron's park when he was in his venerable old age. To the same practice may be justly ascribed the utilitarian philosophy. Old Jeremy Bentham kept himself up to his work for eighty years by his regular 'post-jentacular circumgyrations.' His chief disciple, James Mill, walked incessantly and preached as he walked. John Stuart Mill imbibed at once psychology, political economy, and a love of walks from his father. Walking was his one recreation; it saved him from becoming a mere smoke-dried pedant; and though he put forward the pretext of botanical researches, it helped him to perceive that man is something besides a mere logic machine. Mill's great rival as a spiritual guide, Carlyle, was a vigorous walker, and even in his latest years was a striking figure when performing his regular constitutionals in London. One of the vivid passages in the *Reminiscences* describes his walk with Irving from Glasgow to Drumclog. Here they sat on the 'brow of a peat hag, while far, far away to the westward, over our brown horizon, towered

up white and visible at the many miles of distance a high irregular pyramid. Ailsa Craig we at once guessed, and thought of the seas and oceans over yonder.' The vision naturally led to a solemn conversation, which was an event in both lives. Neither Irving nor Carlyle himself feared any amount of walking in those days, it is added, and next day Carlyle took his longest walk, fifty-four miles. Carlyle is unsurpassable in his descriptions of scenery: from the pictures of mountains in *Sartor Resartus* to the battle-pieces in *Frederick*. Ruskin, himself a good walker, is more rhetorical but not so graphic; and it is self-evident that nothing educates an eye for the features of a landscape so well as the practice of measuring it by your own legs.

The great men, it is true, have not always acknowledged their debt to the genius, whoever he may be, who presides over pedestrian exercise. Indeed, they have inclined to ignore the true source of their impulse. Even when they speak of the beauties of nature, they would give us to understand that they might have been disembodied spirits, taking aerial flights among mountain solitudes, and independent of the physical machinery of legs and stomachs. When long ago the Alps

cast their spell upon me, it was woven in a great degree by the eloquence of *Modern Painters*. I hoped to share Ruskin's ecstasies in a reverent worship of Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. The influence of any cult, however, depends upon the character of the worshipper, and I fear that in this case the charm operated rather perversely. It stimulated a passion for climbing which absorbed my energies and distracted me from the prophet's loftier teaching. I might have followed him from the mountains to picture-galleries, and spent among the stones of Venice hours which I devoted to attacking hitherto unascended peaks and so losing my last chance of becoming an art critic. I became a fair judge of an Alpine guide, but I do not even know how to make a judicious allusion to Botticelli or Tintoretto. I can't say that I feel the smallest remorse. I had a good time, and at least escaped one temptation to talking nonsense. It follows, however, that my passion for the mountains had something earthly in its composition. It is associated with memories of eating and drinking. It meant delightful comradeship with some of the best of friends; but our end, I admit, was not always of the most exalted or æsthetic strain. A certain difficulty results. I

feel an uncomfortable diffidence. I hold that Alpine walks are the poetry of the pursuit; I could try to justify the opinion by relating some of the emotions suggested by the great scenic effects: the sunrise on the snow fields; the storm-clouds gathering under the great peaks; the high pasturages knee-deep in flowers; the torrents plunging through the 'cloven ravines,' and so forth. But the thing has been done before, better than I could hope to do it; and when I look back at those old passages in *Modern Painters*, and think of the enthusiasm which prompted to exuberant sentences of three or four hundred words, I am not only abashed by the thought of their unapproachable eloquence, but feel as though they conveyed a tacit reproach. You, they seem to say, are, after all, a poor prosaic creature, affecting a love of sublime scenery as a cloak for more grovelling motives. I could protest against this judgment, but it is better at present to omit the topic, even though it would give the strongest groundwork for my argument.

Perhaps, therefore, it is better to trust the case for walking to where the external stimulus of splendours and sublimities is not so overpowering.

A philosophic historian divides the world into the regions where man is stronger than nature and the regions where nature is stronger than man. The true charm of walking is most unequivocally shown when it is obviously dependent upon the walker himself. I became an enthusiast in the Alps, but I have found almost equal pleasure in walks such as one described by Cowper, where the view from a summit is bounded, not by Alps or Apennines, but by 'a lofty quickset hedge.' Walking gives a charm to the most commonplace British scenery. A love of walking not only makes any English county tolerable but seems to make the charm inexhaustible. I know only two or three districts minutely, but the more familiar I have become with any one of them the more I have wished to return, to invent some new combination of old strolls or to inspect some hitherto unexplored nook. I love the English Lakes, and certainly not on account of associations. I cannot 'associate.' Much as I respect Wordsworth, I don't care to see the cottage in which he lived : it only suggests to me that anybody else might have lived there. There is an intrinsic charm about the Lake Country, and to me at least a music in the very names of Helvellyn and Skiddaw and

Scawfell. But this may be due to the suggestion that it is a miniature of the Alps. I appeal, therefore, to the Fen Country, the country of which Alton Locke's farmer boasted that it had none of your 'darned ups and downs' and 'was as flat as his barn-door for forty miles on end.' I used to climb the range of the Gogmagogs, to see the tower of Ely, some sixteen miles across the dead level, and I boasted that every term I devised a new route for walking to the cathedral from Cambridge. Many of these routes led by the little public-house called 'Five Miles from Anywhere': which in my day was the Mecca to which a remarkable club, called—from the name of the village—the 'Upware Republic,' made periodic pilgrimages. What its members specifically did when they got there beyond consuming beer is unknown to me; but the charm was in the distance 'from anywhere'—a sense of solitude under the great canopy of the heavens, where, like emblems of infinity,

> The trenched waters run from sky to sky.

I have always loved walks in the Fens. In a steady march along one of the great dykes by the monotonous canal with the exuberant vegetation

dozing in its stagnant waters, we were imbibing the spirit of the scenery. Our talk might be of senior wranglers or the University crew, but we felt the curious charm of the great flats. The absence, perhaps, of definite barriers makes you realise that you are on the surface of a planet rolling through free and boundless space. One queer figure comes back to me—a kind of scholar-gipsy of the fens. Certain peculiarities made it undesirable to trust him with cash, and his family used to support him by periodically paying his score at riverside publics. They allowed him to print certain poems, moreover, which he would impart when one met him on the towpath. In my boyhood, I remember, I used to fancy that the most delightful of all lives must be that of a bargee—enjoying a perpetual picnic. This gentleman seemed to have carried out the idea; and in the intervals of lectures, I could fancy that he had chosen the better part. His poems, alas! have long vanished from my memory, and I therefore cannot quote what would doubtless have given the essence of the local sentiment and invested such names as Wicken Fen or Swaffham Lode with associations equal to those of Arnold's Hincksey ridge and Fyfield elm.

Another set of walks may, perhaps, appeal to more general sympathy. The voice of the sea, we know, is as powerful as the voice of the mountains; and, to my taste, it is difficult to say whether the Land's End is not in itself a more impressive station than the top of Mont Blanc. The solitude of the frozen peaks suggests tombstones and death. The sea is always alive and at work. The hovering gulls and plunging gannets and the rollicking porpoises are animating symbols of a gallant struggle with wind and wave. Even the unassociative mind has a vague sense of the Armada and Hakluyt's heroes in the background. America and Australia are just over the way. 'Is not this a dull place?' asked some one of an old woman whose cottage was near to the Lizard lighthouse. 'No,' she replied, 'it is so "cosmopolitan."' That was a simple-minded way of expressing the charm suggested in Milton's wonderful phrase—

> Where the great Vision of the guarded Mount
> Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold.

She could mentally follow the great ships coming and going, and shake hands with people at the ends of the earth. The very sight of a fishing-

boat, as painters seem to have found out, is a poem in itself. But is it not all written in *Westward Ho!* and in the *Prose Idylls*, in which Kingsley put his most genuine power? Of all walks that I have made, I can remember none more delightful than those round the south-western promontory. I have followed the coast at different times from the mouth of the Bristol Avon by the Land's End to the Isle of Wight, and I am only puzzled to decide which bay or cape is the most delightful. I only know that the most delightful was the more enjoyable when placed in its proper setting by a long walk. When you have made an early start, followed the coast-guard track on the slopes above the cliffs, struggled through the gold and purple carpeting of gorse and heather on the moors, dipped down into quaint little coves with a primitive fishing village, followed the blinding whiteness of the sands round a lonely bay, and at last emerged upon a headland where you can settle into a nook of the rocks, look down upon the glorious blue of the Atlantic waves breaking into foam on the granite, and see the distant sea-levels glimmering away till they blend imperceptibly into cloudland; then you can consume your modest sandwiches, light your pipe,

and feel more virtuous and thoroughly at peace with the universe than it is easy even to conceive yourself elsewhere. I have fancied myself on such occasions to be a felicitous blend of poet and saint—which is an agreeable sensation. What I wish to point out, however, is that the sensation is confined to the walker. I respect the cyclist, as I have said ; but he is enslaved by his machine : he has to follow the highroad, and can only come upon what points of view open to the commonplace tourist. He can see nothing of the retired scenery which may be close to him, and cannot have his mind brought into due harmony by the solitude and by the long succession of lovely bits of scenery which stand so coyly aside from public notice.

The cockney cyclist who wisely seeks to escape at intervals from the region 'where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,' suffers the same disadvantages. To me, for many years, it was a necessity of life to interpolate gulps of fresh air between the periods of inhaling London fogs. When once beyond the 'town' I looked out for notices that trespassers would be prosecuted. That gave a strong presumption that the trespass must have some attraction. The cyclist could

only reflect that trespassing for him was not only forbidden but impossible. To me it was a reminder of the many delicious bits of walking which, even in the neighbourhood of London, await the man who has no superstitious reverence for legal rights. It is indeed surprising how many charming walks can be contrived by a judicious combination of a little trespassing with the rights of way happily preserved over so many commons and footpaths. London, it is true, goes on stretching its vast octopus arms farther into the country. Unlike the devouring dragon of Wantley, to whom 'houses and churches' were like 'geese and turkies,' it spreads houses and churches over the fields of our childhood. And yet, between the great lines of railway there are still fields not yet desecrated by advertisements of liver pills. It is a fact that within twenty miles of London two travellers recently asked their way at a lonely farmhouse; and that the mistress of the house, seeing that they were far from an inn, not only gave them a seat and luncheon, but positively refused to accept payment. That suggested an idyllic state of society which, it is true, one must not count upon discovering. Yet hospitality, the virtue of primitive regions, has

not quite vanished, it would appear, even from this over-civilised region. The travellers, perhaps, had something specially attractive in their manners. In that or some not distant ramble they made time run back for a couple of centuries. They visited the quiet grave where Penn lies under the shadow of the old Friends' meeting-house, and came to the cottage where the seat on which Milton talked to Ellwood about *Paradise Regained* seems to be still waiting for his return; and climbed the hill to the queer monument which records how Captain Cook demonstrated the goodness of Providence by disproving the existence of a continent in the South Sea—(the argument is too obvious to require exposition); and then gazed reverently upon the obelisk, not far off, which marks the point at which George III. concluded a famous stag hunt. A little valley in the quiet chalk country of Buckinghamshire leads past these and other memorials, and the lover of historical associations, with the help of Thorne's *Environs of London*, may add indefinitely to the list. I don't object to an association when it presents itself spontaneously and unobtrusively. It should not be the avowed goal but the accidental addition to the interest of a walk; and it is then

pleasant to think of one's ancestors as sharers in the pleasures. The region enclosed within a radius of thirty miles from Charing Cross has charms enough even for the least historical of minds. You can't hold a fire in your hand, according to a high authority, by thinking on the frosty Caucasus; but I can comfort myself now and then, when the fellow passengers who tread on my heels in London have put me out of temper, by thinking of Leith Hill. It only rises to the height of a thousand feet by help of the 'Folly' on the top, but you can see, says my authority, twelve counties from the tower; and, if certain legendary ordnance surveyors spoke the truth, distinguish the English Channel to the south, and Dunstable Hill, far beyond London, to the north. The Crystal Palace, too, as we are assured, 'sparkles like a diamond.' That is gratifying; but to me the panorama suggests a whole network of paths, which have been the scene of personally conducted expeditions, in which I displayed the skill on which I most pride myself—skill, I mean, in devising judicious geographical combinations, and especially of contriving admirable short cuts. The persistence of some companions in asserting that my short cuts might be

the longest way round shows that the best of men are not free from jealousy. Mine, at any rate, led me and my friends through pleasant places innumerable. My favourite passage in *Pilgrim's Progress*—an allegory which could have occurred, by the way, to no one who was not both a good man and a good walker—was always that in which Christian and Hopeful leave the highroad to cross a stile into 'Bypath Meadow.' I should certainly have approved the plan. The path led them, it is true, into the castle of Giant Despair; but the law of trespass has become milder; and the incident really added that spice of adventure which is delightful to the genuine pilgrim. We defied Giant Despair; and if our walks were not quite so edifying as those of Christian and his friends, they add a pleasant strand to the thread of memory which joins the past years. Conversation, we are often told, like letter-writing, is a lost art. We live too much in crowds. But if ever men can converse pleasantly, it is when they are invigorated by a good march: when the reserve is lowered by the long familiarity of a common pursuit, or when, if bored, you can quietly drop behind, or perhaps increase the pace sufficiently to check the breath of the persistent argufier.

Nowhere, at least, have I found talk flow so freely and pleasantly as in a march through pleasant country. And yet there is also a peculiar charm in the solitary expedition when your interlocutor must be yourself. That may be enjoyed, perhaps even best enjoyed, in London streets themselves. I have read somewhere of a distinguished person who composed his writings during such perambulations, and the statement was supposed to prove his remarkable power of intellectual concentration. My own experience would tend to diminish the wonder. I hopelessly envy men who can think consecutively under conditions distracting to others—in a crowded meeting or in the midst of their children—for I am as sensitive as most people to distraction; but if I can think at all, I am not sure that the roar of the Strand is not a more favourable environment than the quiet of my own study. The mind—one must only judge from one's own—seems to me to be a singularly ill-constructed apparatus. Thoughts are slippery things. It is terribly hard to keep them in the track presented by logic. They jostle each other, and suddenly skip aside to make room for irrelevant and accidental neighbours; till the stream of thought, of which people talk, resembles rather

such a railway journey as one makes in dreams, where at every few yards you are shunted on to the wrong line. Now, though a London street is full of distractions, they become so multitudinous that they neutralise each other. The whirl of conflicting impulses becomes a continuous current because it is so chaotic and determines a mood of sentiment if not a particular vein of reflection. Wordsworth describes the influence upon himself in a curious passage of his *Prelude*. He wandered through London as a raw country lad, seeing all the sights from Bartholomew Fair to St. Stephen's, and became a unit of the 'monstrous ant-hill in a too busy world.' Of course, according to his custom, he drew a moral, and a most excellent moral, from the bewildering complexity of his new surroundings. He learnt, it seems, to recognise the unity of man and to feel that the spirit of nature was upon him 'in London's vast domain' as well as on the mountains. That comes of being a philosophical poet with a turn for optimism. I will not try to interpret or to comment, for I am afraid that I have not shared the emotions which he expresses. A cockney, born and bred, takes surroundings for granted. The hubbub has ceased to distract him; he is like the people who were

said to become deaf because they always lived within the roar of a waterfall: he realises the common saying that the deepest solitude is solitude in a crowd; he derives a certain stimulus from a vague sympathy with the active life around him, but each particular stimulus remains, as the phrase goes, 'below the threshold of consciousness.' To some such effect, till psychologists will give me a better theory, I attribute the fact that what I please to call my 'mind' seems to work more continuously and coherently in a street walk than elsewhere. This, indeed, may sound like a confession of cynicism. The man who should open his mind to the impressions naturally suggested by the 'monstrous ant-hill' would be in danger of becoming a philanthropist or a pessimist, of being overpowered by thoughts of gigantic problems, or of the impotence of the individual to solve them. Carlyle, if I remember rightly, took Emerson round London in order to convince his optimistic friend that the devil was still in full activity. The gates of hell might be found in every street. I remember how, when coming home from a country walk on a sweltering summer night, and seeing the squalid population turning out for a gasp of air in their only playground, the vast labyrinth of hideous

lanes, I seemed to be in Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*. Even the vanishing of quaint old nooks is painful when one's attention is aroused. There is a certain churchyard wall, which I pass sometimes, with an inscription to commemorate the benefactor who erected it 'to keep out the pigs.' I regret the pigs and the village green which they presumably imply. The heart, it may be urged, must be hardened not to be moved by many such texts for melancholy reflection. I will not argue the point. None of us can be always thinking over the riddle of the universe, and I confess that my mind is generally employed on much humbler topics. I do not defend my insensibility nor argue that London walks are the best. I only maintain that even in London, walking has a peculiar fascination. The top of an omnibus is an excellent place for meditation; but it has not, for me at least, that peculiar hypnotic influence which seems to be favourable to thinking, and to pleasant day-dreaming when locomotion is carried on by one's own muscles. The charm, however, is that even a walk in London often vaguely recalls better places and nobler forms of the exercise. Wordsworth's Susan hears a

thrush at the corner of Wood Street, and straightway sees

> A mountain ascending, a vision of trees,
> Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
> And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

The gulls which seem lately to have found out the merits of London give to occasional Susans, I hope, a whiff of fresh sea-breezes. But, even without gulls or wood-pigeons, I can often find occasions in the heart of London for recalling the old memories, without any definable pretext ; little pictures of scenery, sometimes assignable to no definable place, start up invested with a faint aroma of old friendly walks and solitary meditations and strenuous exercise, and I feel convinced that, if I am not a thorough scoundrel, I owe that relative excellence to the harmless monomania which so often took me, to appropriate Bunyan's phrase, from the amusements of *Vanity Fair* to the *Delectable Mountains* of pedestrianism.

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